

India Now

March, 1983

Monthly News Publication of Indian People's
Association in North America (IPANA)

This PDF is prepared by Sukhwant Hundal in memory of his father
Shivdev S. Hundal and mother Harbans Kaur Hundal.

Source: Sukhwant Hundal's personal collections

INDIA NOW

Vol. 6 No. 3 March 1983 Monthly News Publication of Indian People's Association in North America

Elections in Assam

Over 3,500 Killed

Election Boycott Successful Amidst Heavy Paramilitary Presence

KISHAN BAJWA

Assam faced the worst form of human tragedy in its history when according to official estimates, over 3,500 people including women and children, Hindus, Muslims and tribals, were killed and tens of thousands became homeless as Prime Minister Indira Gandhi went ahead with her plan to hold elections in the state. Unofficial sources put the number of people killed to be much higher. The number of people who were killed by paramilitary forces and police as well as in sectarian violence during the 40-month-old agitation led by the All Assam Students Union (AASU) and the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSU) before the election to the 126-member state assembly and 12 parliament seats were announced, became insignificant compared to the number of people who lost their lives during the polling period.

The Gandhi government had determined not to call in the army for help during the election period and instead relying on 100,000 paramilitary and armed police personnel so that it could present to the world that the elections in Assam did not take place under army rule. But the army had to be called in to enforce law and order on Feb 19, the day after the worst form of rioting. On the last day of polling, Feb. 20, over 2000 people were feared dead. Thousands of tribals armed with homemade guns, machetes and spears attacked 17 villages inhabited by Muslims around Bhagduba Habi (Nellie), near Gauhati. Huts and dwellings were burnt and many people, including women, children and old men were killed. Tensions in the area are still high as new dead bodies are being discovered in ricefields. Sporadic fighting in Nellie and other affected areas is still continuing.



Wounded survivors of an attack on a Muslim village, in a refugee camp near Nellie, Assam. —A.P. Times, A.P.

Conflicting reports were available about the rioting as we go to the press. The first major incident of violence, according to many reports, took place near Mangaldoi, 50 miles northeast of Gauhati, on Feb 2 in which armed Muslim immigrants attacked a village inhabited by Assamese Hindus in which many huts were burnt and some people were killed. It was followed by an attack on the eve of the first day of polling on Feb. 14 by a largely Muslim mob on Chamaria killing over 20 people. Then there were attacks on a group of 15 villages in the Gohpur area of Darrang district and many others. It appears that the attacks prior to Feb 16 or so were initiated primarily by immigrants but it is not confirmed.

The Western news media have largely emphasized the religious aspect, portraying the violence as between Hindus and Muslims. Indian media on the other hand have not considered this aspect of much significance in their reporting. There was also a report of attacks by tribals on a native Assamese Hindu village in Gohpur area. There are reportedly a sizable number of Muslims also who have been living in Assam for a long period and who have supported the agitation.

GANDHI BLAMES AGITATORS

Prime Minister Indira Gandhi toured the affected areas on Feb 21 and said, "I can hardly find words to describe the (continued on page 9)

Workers Fired for Asking Proper Pay

Our Toronto Correspondent

Twelve Indian factory workers are fighting to get their jobs back following a pay dispute with their Mississauga employer, Delta Plating Company. On February 1, 12 Indians, working for about \$5 an hour for over 18 months, decided to ask the owner for a 30-cents-an-hour raise promised earlier by the owner. The owner refused and even asked them to not ask for any overtime pay owed to them since last August. When the workers asked when they would get their overtime pay, the owner took their time-cards and told them that they were all fired. Later, the owner claimed that the workers were in fact staging a sit-down strike and therefore he had no choice but to fire them. Despite this, on their separation certificates for unemployment insurance, he gave the reason as having left the job on their own.

On hearing this news, IPANA-Toronto investigated the matter and initiated a (continued on page 5)

Commission Denounces Racist Impact of Farm Labor Policies

At a news conference on February 17, Charles Paris, chairman of the British Columbia Human Rights Commission, denounced Canadian labor policy concerning farmworkers for its racist impact.

Most farm and domestic workers are members of racial minorities and most of both groups are women. Much of the basic labor protection legislation, such as laws governing minimum wages and hours of work, do not apply to them; health regulations often are not enforced in their case, and the poverty and misery that mark their lives are brushed off as the peripheral concerns of modern life.

This is consistent with Canada's history in the area. The Minimum Wage Act of 1925, for example, provided a minimum wage for employees in most industries except canners, farm laborers and domestics. Those were the only jobs the federal immigration policy of the day allowed immigrating Asians to fill.

echo, excluded from hourly minimum wage protection "farmers historically employed on a piecework basis to hand-harvest fruit, vegetables, or berry crops."

The Commission's report stated, "...when the brunt of our laws (or exclusion from benefits or failure to enforce regulations) falls disproportionately on ethnic minorities we must consider its impact."

"Why are we discriminated against?" asked Raj Chouhan, president of the Canadian Farm Workers Union, during the press conference. We don't even get the minimum wage. Are we not human beings? We are the ones who put food on everybody's table, but we can't even afford food for ourselves."

But change, Chairman Paris noted, is slow to come.

A few years ago the infant Sukhdeep Madhar drowned in a bucket of water in a converted horse stall that housed her family on the farm where her parents worked. An inquest jury recommended immediate legislation to set standards for

INSIDE

The Case of the Counterfeit Release 2

Dandavate on Laws to Help Women 6

Gandhi and Attenborough's "Gandhi" 8

Patna: Revolt in the Slums 12

PUDR Holds Second Convention

A Special Correspondent

New Delhi, January 23: Nearly 100 people including many women met at the Constitution Club, New Delhi, today on the occasion of the second annual convention of People's Union for Democratic Rights (PUDR). The theme of the convention was to examine the link between the existing legal system and the economics and politics of the country.

During their deliberations on concrete experiences in defending the democratic rights of workers, women, intellectuals, and others subjected to legal and police harassment, various speakers pointed out that essentially the present legal system in India is a continuation of that prevailing during the British colonial rule.

One of the speakers presented concrete evidence to show that in several states such as Andhra and Assam, the government is violating its own laws to suppress political activists. As an example, for 1 person killed within the framework of the existing law, nearly 400 were killed illegally during so-called encounters.

Gobind Mukhoty, the president of PUDR, detailed how there was no constitutional guarantee against violations of human rights by the police and other agencies. Two members of IPANA who were present at the meeting were invited to express their views. Both expressed support for PUDR's work.

farm labor housing and called for "immediate inspections" of farm work camps. There has been no real improvement in conditions, no new legislation, and no enforcement of existing industrial camp regulations.

In October the BC Medical Association called for strict new regulations and new standards for handling pesticides, since the chemicals pose terrible hazards for farmworkers and their families. The issue is still unresolved.

The Commission's report, "What This Country Did to Us, It Did to Itself", proposes a whole range of protective changes in labor and immigration laws. Their implementation remains to be seen.

(from article by Linda Hossie, The Vancouver Sun)

Manipur: Missing Dead The Case of the Counterfeit Release

Chandam Chaoba, a middle aged father of 7 children, of Pukdao Terapur village, 18 miles from Imphal, has been missing. According to his wife, Chandam Ongbi Chaobi, her husband was arrested on January 10, 1981 by men belonging to the 5th Battalion of the CRPF stationed in the area. When neither the CRPF nor the Manipur government responded to her inquiries about the whereabouts of her husband, Chaobi had no recourse left but to approach the Gauhati High court. The high court has recently held that her grievances and apprehensions are justified and has directed the respondents to produce Chaoba before the court.

The CRPF acknowledges the arrest but claims that it took place 4 days later, on January 14, and that Chandam Chaoba

was anyway released the next day. In support of this claim, the commandant of the 5th Battalion of the CRPF produced two situation reports dated January 14 and January 15, entries in the apprehension register and an affidavit from another person who claimed that Chaoba was released along with him and that he had seen Chaoba later in Imphal on more than one occasion. The high court has held that the entries in the register and other official CRPF records have been manipulated and that Chaoba should therefore be considered as being still in CRPF custody. Everything points in the direction that Chaoba is probably dead.

The observations of the high court and the submissions made on behalf of the respondents provide interesting insights into the working of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act 1958 in the northeast.

According to the court, Chaoba was clearly not a person who had committed any cognizable offense; at best, "he was a person against whom a reasonable suspicion might have existed that he was about to commit such an offense" and after his arrest, the authorities were bound to hand him over to the civilian authorities together with the details of the circumstances of the arrest, so that the civilian authorities could investigate further to find whether the "reasonable suspicion" of the army authorities was warranted. The CRPF commandant did not do this; instead, on CRPF's own admission, after being detained for over 24 hours, he was allegedly "let off" on the



Sons and daughters of Chandam Chaoba wait for their missing father.

ground that there was no ground for suspecting Chaoba's involvement in insurgency. The high court rejected this argument observing that "reasonable suspicion" should have preceded arrest and not followed it. Further the task of finding out whether this suspicion is justified or not belongs to the civilian authority to whom the arrested suspect should have been handed over "with the least possible delay" and not simply "let off."

The judge argued that "The submission of the learned Advocate General, Assam, that only such person against whom a prime facie is found after further interrogation following arrest are required by Section 5 to be handed over to the police does not merit our acceptance because the prime facie satisfaction must

precede arrest... If we were to concede to this submission of the learned Advocate General, we would virtually be giving untrammelled power of arrest to the armed forces much beyond what is permitted by Section 4(c) of the act."

Curiously, the authorities also said in defense of their "release" of Chaoba is that they had reason to believe and fear that any suspect handed over to the civilian authorities (the police) may be subjected to further misery and torture at the hands of the police. It is instructive that the armed forces should have shed some light on what happens in police stations, even if they were doing so in order to cover up what possibly happened to unfortunate Chaoba in the CRPF camp.

(from Econ. & Pol. Weekly)

Bonded Labor in Tihar Jail

SUDIP MAZUMDAR

Ever heard of prisoners undergoing simple imprisonment wanting to change their sentences to rigorous imprisonment?

In Delhi's Tihar Central Jail, scores of prisoners convicted on simple charges, apparently pray before the jail administration to make them suffer rigorous jail terms.

The jail officials would like us to believe this story.

In reality, poor and illiterate prisoners, unaware of their rights, are being made to affix their thumb impressions on jail records, making them appear willing to do hard work. They are the steady supply of "bonded labor" in the jail.

Batches of prisoners, mostly able-bodied men between 20 and 35 years, are taken out every morning from their cells

and are engaged in domestic work of the jail officials or on the 10-acre jail farm.

Chander Singh, aged 23, was sentenced to 20 days' simple imprisonment by a railway magistrate for traveling without a ticket on October 13. He was produced before a jail official on October 15 and asked to affix his left thumb impression on the history ticket, below which a jail official wrote two lines in Hindi, which translate as "I want to get my simple imprisonment changed into rigorous imprisonment."

Bishan Sarup, aged 32, was sentenced to two months' simple imprisonment on September 9. His thumb impression was also obtained on the history ticket and the same "prayer" in Hindi was written underneath.

Devinder Kumar, aged 24, Mohan Singh (23), Ramesh Kumar (23) and Daya Chand (22) all started doing hard labor within a few days of their entry into the jail in the last few months. Each of them had been awarded 20 days' simple imprisonment for minor offenses. None is a habitual offender nor has any case pending. In fact, all of them went to jail for the first time.

None of these bonded labor gets paid any wages, although the Jail Manual prescribes remuneration for work by prisoners undergoing rigorous imprisonment.

The Supreme Court has remarked: "A prisoner wears the armor of basic freedom even when behind bars and on breach thereof by lawless officials the law will respond to his distress signals."

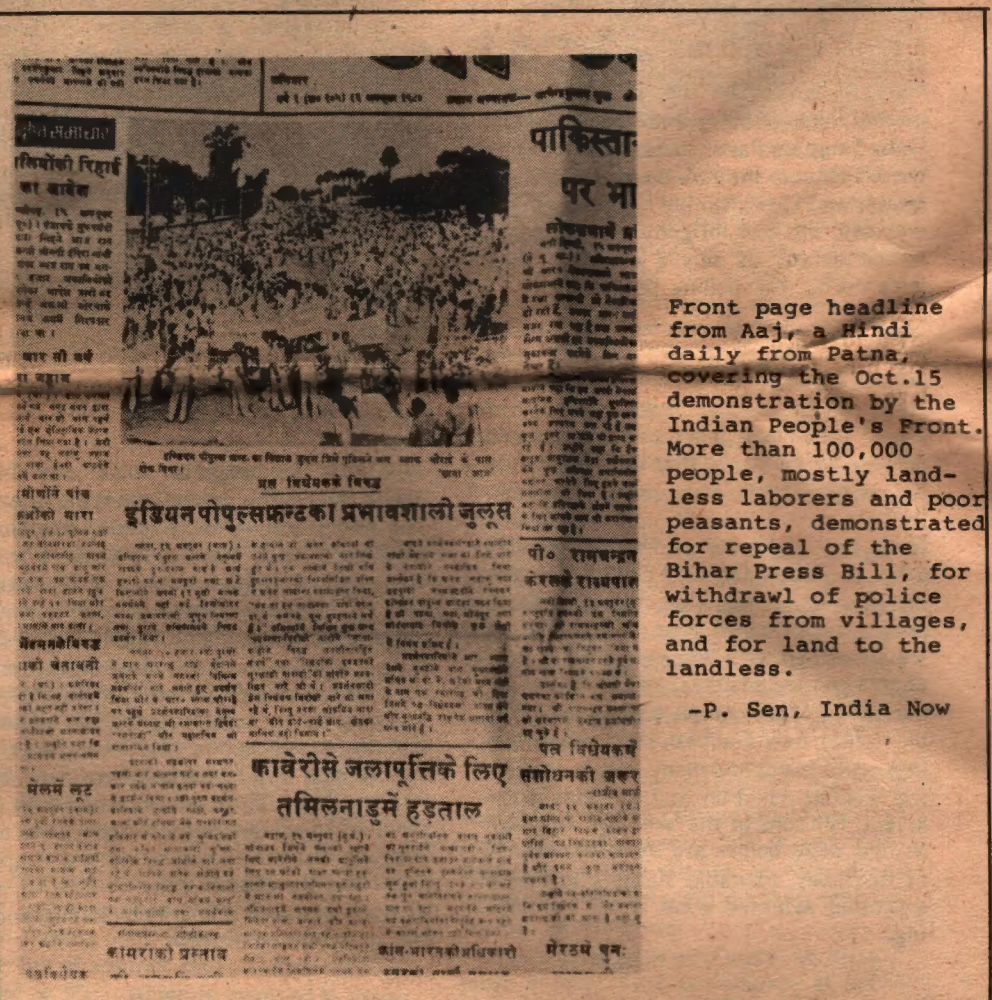
The distress signals have been coming from Tihar Jail for many years now.

(from the Indian Express)

Pipe-Dwellers' Case before Supreme Court

A division bench of the Supreme Court issued notice on January 25 to the state of Andhra to show cause why a letter bringing out the plight of the Waddar community living in abandoned cement pipes on the outskirts of Hyderabad should not be admitted for hearing.

Justices P.N.Bhagwati, R.S.Pathak and A.N.Sen were acting on a letter written by M.K.Manohar Lal, an assistant headmaster, on the basis of an article in the Hindu in December about subhuman conditions under which Waddars, a poor community, live.



Front page headline from Aaj, a Hindi daily from Patna, covering the Oct. 15 demonstration by the Indian People's Front. More than 100,000 people, mostly landless laborers and poor peasants, demonstrated for repeal of the Bihar Press Bill, for withdrawal of police forces from villages, and for land to the landless.

-P. Sen, India Now

High Court Chief Justices to be from Outside State

In a major policy decision, the central government decided on January 28 that chief justices of all the High Courts would be appointed from outside the concerned states.

Reactions from lawyers and ex-judges ranged from support to criticism.

V.M.Tarkunde, former judge and a petitioner in the judges' transfer case, and Soli Sorabjee expressed their opposition to the wholesale transfer policy but recommended selective transfers for adequate reason.

L.M.Singhvi, president of the Supreme Court Bar Association, said that the implementation of the policy must be non-discriminatory and there should be a credible mechanism to work it. Though some state bar associations have supported the policy of transfer of judges, Singhvi wished there was fuller discussion on this controversial matter and a clear consensus should have been arrived at.

INDIAN PEOPLE'S ASSOCIATION IN NORTH AMERICA

President: Harinder Mahil, Vancouver
Secretary: Dr. Shree Mulay, Montreal
Central Office:

IPANA
P.O. Box 69646, Stn. "K"
Vancouver, B.C. V5K 4W7
Canada

Units:

Albany: Box 22940, Stn. A
SUNY Albany, NY 12222
Boston: P.O. Box 120, MIT Branch
Cambridge, Mass. 02139
Montreal: P.O. Box 37
Westmount Que. H3Z 2T1

New Jersey: P.O. Box 8
Oakhurst, N.J. 07755
New York: P.O. Box 665
New York, NY 10025

Saskatoon: 43 Columbia Drive
Saskatoon, Sask. S7K 1E6
Toronto: P.O. Box 1135, Stn. B
Weston, Ont. M9L 2Q8

INDIA NOW is published every month by IPANA, P.O. Box 665, Cathedral Station, New York, NY 10025, USA.

Annual subscriptions are \$10 in the US and Canada, \$16 overseas.

For institutions and libraries, subscriptions are \$16 in the US and Canada, \$20 overseas.

Correspondence from Canada and overseas should be sent to the Montreal address.

I am enclosing \$... to cover the following subscriptions:

FOR MYSELF

Name:
Address:

☐ Renewal ☐ New

FOR FRIENDS

Name:
Address:

☐ Renewal ☐ New

Name:
Address:

☐ Subscription ☐ Sample

MARCH 1983 INDIA NOW

Probe Panel Charges Army Atrocities in Nagaland

Sumanta Banerjee

A team of women social workers from Delhi visited the Naga-inhabited areas of Manipur in August and have come out with shocking disclosures about army atrocities on Naga women. The team consisted of Pramila Dandavate, MP, Nandita Haksar of the People's Union for Democratic Rights, Delhi; Urmila Phadnis of the People's Union for Civil Liberties; Kirti Singh of Janwadi Mahila Samiti, Subhadra Joshi of the Sampradayikta Vir-odhi Dal and Premila Loomba of the National Federation of Indian Women.

An ambush and assassination of 22 persons of the 21st Sikh Regiment including some officers on February 19, 1982, by Naga insurgents on the Imphal-Ukhrul road became a pretext for the jawans to go berserk and assault innocent women. Till now they have not been able to apprehend any insurgent and they are taking it out on the womenfolk.

The hills make up 9/10 of the total area of Manipur and are inhabited mainly by the Nagas. The villages situated here are a sensitive area since they provide the Naga underground with a route to Burma where it has its base.

Immediately after the incident of February 19, the army started combing operations in the villages near the spot. The pattern of the operations recalls happenings in Viet Nam during the war. Villagers were herded at a stipulated place by the jawans. Men and women were pushed and kicked out of their beds. Women were made special targets. Here are some important findings from the report submitted by the team:

"At Paorei, in an interview with 18-year-old twins, Ningthingla and Sothingwon, and their mother Ningkuila, our respondents told us that since their house was on the far side of the village, they did not know of the Army's arrival. One jawan suddenly entered their house and started pulling Ningthingla's hair. He tried to touch Sothingwon's face and kiss her... The people of the entire village were asked to assemble often at the playground or Church compound. Men and women were told to stand apart. Sometimes married women were separated from unmarried women. ... Women were sometimes compelled to urinate in the playground while the watching jawans taunted them. ... Nungbi girls had to pass by the army post on their way to school

and the jawans exposed their private parts. ... On the pretext of telling women to go to the playground, women were touched and manhandled. ... K.M.S. Athing is a young woman of about 18-20 years. She along with two others, Kathingla and Thotwonla, was taken away from Kalhang to Nungbi post on two occasions - February 22 and 25. We went to see her at the house and she began by saying that she was scared for her life. The army had told the pastor (a day before we arrived) to tell her to keep quiet..."

The army appeared to be bent on desecrating the churches in the areas. The majority of the Nagas here are Christians. Whenever there is combing, the army herds the villagers inside the Church and keeps them confined there for hours. On Aug. 13, the army forced the pastor of Tora village to open the Church so that it could camp there. The pastor said to the women's team: "The army treats the Church like a public hall and not a holy place. Would other Indians tolerate it if the army camped inside a temple or a gurdwara?"

The findings of the team reveal that the army has been given a long leash by the Government. The civil administration is absolutely powerless in these areas of Manipur. The Sikh Regiment camped at Pettigrew College Campus at Ukhrul without the permission of the Deputy Commissioner. When the women's team met the Deputy Commissioner and asked him about the matter, he said that apparently there was some misunderstanding because there was nothing on record to show that the civil authorities had granted permission to the Regiment. He admitted that the District Magistrate could not "arrest" a jawan even if he commits a crime unless it is murder or rape." In March during combing operations when wives of arrested persons went to complain to the Deputy Commissioner at Ukhrul, he said that he was helpless and that his phone had been cut off. He visited several villages after the army operation and received complaints of excesses. When asked by the team why such incidents of torture had taken place, he replied that they were "just a temporary aberration when the chain of command broke."

Senior army officers thrive on the fear generated among the Naga people by the terror tactics indulged in by their

jawans. One major proudly declared: "The Sikh Regiment has been feared for the last 25 years. When Aizawl was taken over by the insurgents it was the Sikhs who saved it. They are the best troops with a tradition of valor and bravery."

When the team asked the military authorities how many underground insurgents they had arrested, they replied that they had not been able to arrest any because the "villagers protected them or were scared of them." Unnerved by the killing of their colleagues and frustrated in their efforts to trace the assailants, the army is resorting to the shortest route of taking revenge on innocent villagers. Typical was the reaction of a Major who said: "The villagers know where the ambushers are but they don't hand over the murderers. If I was not in uniform I would not help people who killed Major Shekhawat who was a friend. Just because we kept some girls standing for a few hours so much fuss is made."

TWO MEMBERS OF TEAM REFUSE TO SIGN REPORT

At the last moment of drafting of the final report, Joshi and Loomba withdrew from the panel and refused to sign the report because they did not agree with its "tone." Soon after the report was released, Joshi and Loomba came out with a contradiction stating that "there was no highhandedness or misuse of power of the army." Instead they said, "the regiment has been effectively dealing with insurgency in Manipur," and blamed the "secessionist underground" for creating prejudice against the regiment.

Surprisingly, both the members were present when the women victims narrated accounts of army atrocities. Joshi even complained to the Brigadier in charge of the area of the harassment of women by the jawans. Not once during the tour, did Joshi or Loomba raise misgivings about the investigation, a complaint they later made in their press statement.

GOVERNMENT PRECURE?

During the drafting of the report, Loomba opposed inclusion of case histories of army atrocities collected by the team, on the ground they would betray "sympathy" for the Nagas. Joshi even suggested that the team should first present the report to Indira Gandhi and not release to the press. When the other

members of the team refused to oblige them, they on their own submitted a separate report to Gandhi, whitewashing the army's role in Manipur. Both Joshi and Loomba are close to CPI (the latter is the widow of the late CPI trade union leader Satish Loomba).

SC CURBS ARMY IN NAGA AREAS

The Supreme Court, in a preliminary ruling, ordered the army not to use religious or educational institutions in the Naga dominated areas of Northeastern India to set up camps or interrogate people. The ruling was made in response to 3 petitions filed by the People's Union for Democratic Rights (PUDR), the Human Rights Forum, and the Manipur and Naga People's Movement for Human Rights, by a 3-judge bench of Chief Justice YV Chandrachud and Justices RSPathak and AP Sen.

The petitions challenged the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act of 1958, which has now been made applicable to the northeastern states. The Act confers wide powers on the armed forces, including searching homes and arresting people without warrants. It also empowers officers to shoot to kill if they deem that public order was threatened.

Earlier, the Supreme Court demanded replies from the center, the state of Manipur, the commandant of the 21st Sikh Regiment based in Ukhrul, Manipur; it was acting on a habeas corpus writ on the disappearance of the Rev. C. Paul, assistant pastor of the Huining Baptist Church and C. Daniel, headmaster of a junior high school, both in Manipur.

Troops of the 21st Sikh Regiment stormed Huining village on May 3 last year and took several villagers prisoners. The following day, several prisoners were beaten, tortured and at least one person died of gunshot wounds. On May 7, 5 men of the Regiment interrupted at the Sunday morning service at Huining church and forcibly collected signatures from persons gathered there saying that no disturbance had occurred in the village earlier.

Paul and Daniel were then handcuffed and led away by the troops. When their wives made inquiries, army officers informed them that the two had been released, although they are still missing.

(from Frontier)

Laldenga Wants Independent Mizoram

B.K. TIWARI

The so-called provisional government of Mizoram is reported to have told New Delhi that it would not reopen peace negotiations without the participation of Laldenga, who is now in exile in Britain.

Laldenga says he received a report dated January 10 from his underground headquarters to say that the Indian government in recent days had sent two peace feelers but was rebuffed because it wanted to keep Laldenga out of the picture.

"The government of India's policy is to separate me from my people. They cannot succeed in driving a wedge between us," he said in an exclusive interview.

Laldenga lives in a small semi-detached house in Woking (Surrey) with his wife and two children - a son and a daughter. His other son and daughter are still in New Delhi. He said they were being harassed by the police. "They would neither leave them in peace nor let them come to Britain."

But are you prepared to restart talks with the Indian authorities? "Yes, if they are unconditional and if they are held here or anywhere outside ... but not in India. I do not want to be arrested." He recalled the ordeal he passed through during the Desai regime when he was sent to Tihar Jail for four months and lodged in solitary confinement. "Now I don't trust the government of India."

Laldenga said that if this time the talks restart, the basis would be "total and complete independence. ... Before

we were committed to resolve the issue within the Indian Constitution. ... Now because of changed circumstances we have revised our stand. Our underground leaders (of the provisional government) have already declared their goal as complete independence. ... As such the question of having talks with the government of India within the Indian Constitution does not arise."

He said that his demands were insignificant before what the Sikhs are now demanding. "I have sympathy for the Sikhs." He said he was not even asking for any "special status like Kashmir." "Our demands were plain and simple. ... We simply wanted protection of special rights for Mizos ... like in economic and land matters and employment."

Laldenga said he was not asking for the moon. But if the Mizoram problem had been resolved it would have paved the way for resolving other problems - Naga, Assam, Tripura, etc., which are sitting on a powder keg. He said he was seeing a red signal around north-eastern India.

"India should now wake up and see what is happening in North-East India and try to resolve the problems in the interest of the country." He said he had told Mrs Gandhi that if the Mizo problem could be resolved, "I will be prepared to help the government of India in their endeavor to solve the problems of other north-east states."

(from the Indian Express)

A Visit to Nagaland after the Elections

HARISH CHANDOLA

On the mountain terraces around Kohima, the ripe paddy is now molten gold, flowing from folds into the valleys. In the town itself, wild cherry is in glorious bloom, drowning the rusted tin-roofs in shimmering pools of pink. Swarms of bees singing songs pass overhead from tree to tree. The mellow November sunshine ripens the fragrance-laden air. Drunk on it, I go to my village, Khonoma.

The talk turns to the elections in November 1982. Congress(I) has come to power in Nagaland for the first time. This has been done by luring seven independents with ministerial office and an eighth with the chairmanship of the Nagaland Sugar Industry. The new chief minister, S.C. Jamir, has struggled for days to put together a cabinet.

It was a violent and very expensive election. Four people died in the Ao country during the election activity and the hospitals there are still full of those injured in the election fights. Some even fled from their homes.

Some candidates reportedly spent over Rs 2 million each. The average number of voters in a constituency in Nagaland is less than 9,000. The state's population is 774,000. The number of voters this time was 572,963 - over 70% of the population, which is unusually high. Candidates tell me that a number of children who could not even reach the top of the election officials' tables came to vote and were given ballot papers since their names were in the electoral roll.

At all centers where it was felt that

an independent might win, agents of Congress(I) maintained a vigil during the counting, and no sooner was an independent declared elected, they congratulated him, humored and cajoled him to drive with them to his village to collect his things before going up to Kohima to take the oath.

(from the Indian Express)

Court Orders Minimum Wage for Relief Work

The Supreme Court has struck down the Famine Relief Work Employees (Exemption from Labor Laws) Act of Rajasthan as unconstitutional. The state government has, like most others, been paying for famine works on a piece-rate basis. This means that workers who do not fill the norms end up being paid less than the statutory minimum daily wage. The court has held that piece-rates cannot be paid unless there is a specific notification under the Minimum Wages Act relating work to output.

Another criticism of piece rate is that the old, the sick, and women get much less for their labor than healthy men, so that the most needy get the least. Malpractices have also been reported, such as supervisors taking a cut before certifying the amount of work done.

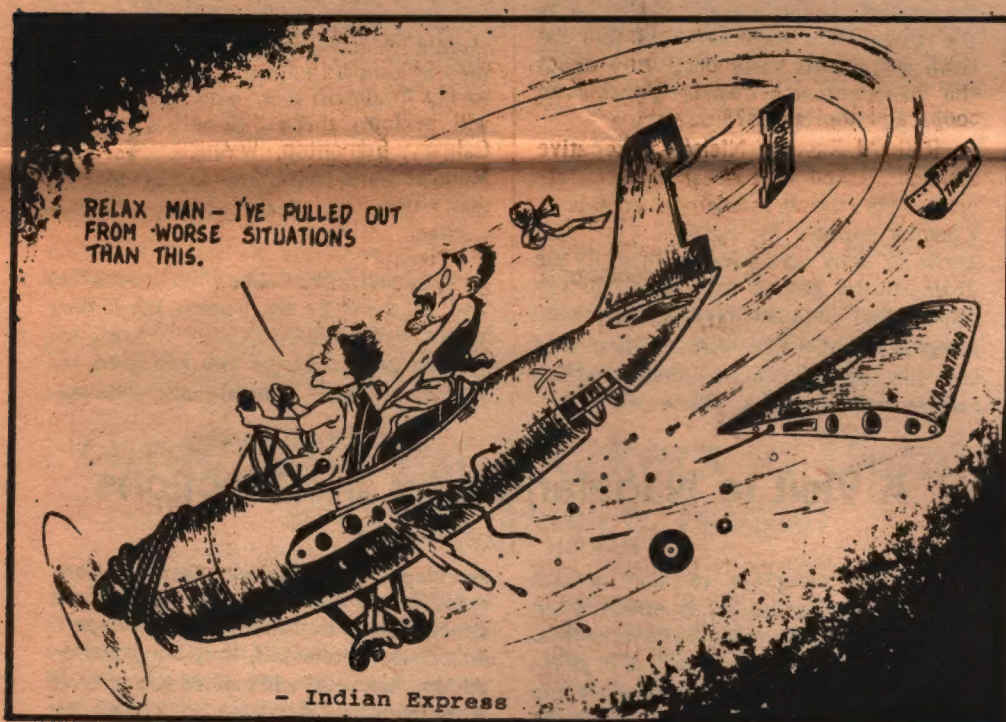
Who is Responsible for Thousands of Deaths in Assam?

Last month in Assam, India suffered the worst form of violence since the communal riots after Partition. The lives of over 3,500 people and homes of tens of thousands could have been spared if Indira Gandhi had seen the reality even belatedly and called off the elections. What more evidence did she need about the widespread unpopularity of the elections? Local officials refused to supervise the elections. She had to send over 5,000 bureaucrats from New Delhi and other states, many of whom resisted, especially in Bihar, despite remunerations offered. The printing presses refused to print electoral rolls and ballots; the Election Commission had to go to West Bengal. The detention of the Assam movement leaders under NSA soon after their return to Gauhati from talks with the government, imposition of press censorship and the presence of 100,000 armed personnel turning Assam into an armed camp did not deter people from protesting and boycotting the elections. Although calls for election boycott have been given before, this is the first time in the electoral history of independent India that a call for boycott has been successful.

There were less than 200 nominations filed for 126 seats; the only partners Gandhi could find in this enterprise were her progressive friends, CPI and CPM. If the deeds of the left and democratic alliance in Assam, who were most out-

spoken about the fraudulent nature of elections in El Salvador, do not expose their opportunism, what else can? The reason for their participation in this greatest fraud imposed on the Assamese people by Gandhi can at best be Bengali chauvinism and at worst be the understanding that Indira would in the final analysis come out victorious in the Assam crisis, so why not grab this opportunity to get some seats in the Assembly.

Indira Gandhi as well as CPI and CPM's hands are drenched with the blood of those killed and no amount of self-criticism by them, of which there are no indications yet, can wash their hands. It is Indira Gandhi who, knowing very well that elections in Assam were not going to resolve the 40-month-old crisis, still went ahead with the elections out of sheer arrogance and the desire to show to the country and the world that she was still in command. It is the announcement of elections and their holding which have resulted in this unfortunate violence, never seen during the 40-month-old agitation; the tensions in Assam have never been as high as before. It is Indira Gandhi and her government that are responsible for the killings of thousands - Hindus, Muslims, Tribals, Assamese and Bengalis, women, children and old - in Assam. It is Indira Gandhi who is responsible for heightened tensions among different communities in Assam.



Letter

Anti-Naxalite Achievements of Promode Dasgupta are Misdeeds

To the Editor:

The unsigned obituary, "Architect of Left Front Promode Dasgupta Passes Away," in the January issue of India Now described one of Promode Dasgupta's achievements as "holding the party (CPM) together during 1967-70 of the Naxalbari movement and the formation of CPI-ML (Communist Party of India - Marxist Leninist)."

In accordance with the wish of many members and the political spirit of IPANA which produces India Now and on my own behalf, I wish to put on record my strong indignation at this statement and request that India Now should retract this statement and state that the article does not reflect the position of IPANA and India Now.

Given the extensive coverage given to Dasgupta's death by various newspapers in India and in accordance with previous practices of India Now, it is correct

to publish an obituary note. However, Dasgupta was a party leader of CPM and not a mass leader. An evaluation of what role he played in the CPM hierarchy remains subjective. The article should have remained factual and the author should have refrained from editorializing.

Who and what saved CPM during 1967-70, what led to its complete rout in 1971 assembly elections in West Bengal and what made CPM more acceptable than CPI at the end of 1975-77 period of Emergency can be debated. The point is that if an obituary is not a place to recount misdeeds of the deceased, it is also not a place to implicitly or explicitly denigrate Naxalites for whose killings in West Bengal the enthusiasm of Promode Dasgupta was second to none.

D.R. Varma
Montreal Unit of IPANA

NOTE FROM THE EDITORS: The editors agree with the sentiments expressed in the above letter.

Safeguarding National Aspirations of Assamese People Alone Can End Chaos

Daya R. Varma

Assam has recently seen the worst form of violence in which over 3500 people have been killed. There is no other reason why so many lives had to be given away except for the vehemence and arrogance of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi whose government went ahead with the elections and who continued to have support, for opportunistic reasons, of the so called left and democratic alliance of CPI and CPM.

No one, even Gandhi's government, expected the elections to resolve the issues raised during the 40-month-old agitation led by All Assam Students Union (AASU) and the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP).

Why has Assam been rocked by unending agitation? And why does it face the most violent suppression second only to that seen in Nagaland, Mizoram and Manipur? And curiously, why does this repression continue to get the support of CPM, CPI and many others who stand for the aspirations of all nationalities? Obviously different actions conform to the interests of these forces. But can violent repression solve the Assamese problem without exterminating the Assamese people? And if not, what is the solution? This article is more an attempt to initiate a debate on this issue with a different perspective, rather a well-formed position.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The problem of Assam is complex. It is complicated by the fact that the Assamese people are being progressively reduced to a minority in their own land through a set of historical events that began during British colonial rule.

To exploit the tea gardens and the oil of Assam, the British rulers brought workers and petty bureaucrats from outside, mostly from undivided Bengal. The partition of India into two brought another significant migration to this state. The formation of Bangladesh in 1971 saw another exodus and highlighted the problem which is now being felt in its enormity because the central government as well as the state governments refused to be sensitive to the nationalist sentiments of the local people which were expressed among other forms in many protests in the 60's and 70's. All this finally caused justifiable fear among the Assamese people that their language, culture and national political rights are threatened beyond solution.

The agitation that followed in 1979 involved various sections of the population and has had very wide support among the local population. Apart from murders by the Indian police and army, sectarian violence also erupted before the recent elections were announced taking many innocent lives, both Assamese and Bengali. However, the violence was not as widespread and brutal and did not result in the loss of as many lives as has been seen since Gandhi announced elections.

The answer of the Indian rulers and that of CPI and CPM was to suppress this agitation by violent means, denigrate this problem as one inspired by foreign powers, and condemn AASU and AAGSP for being against Oriya and Bihari workers. This statement of course touched the heart of many progressive souls in the rest of the country who refused to look at the problem and only found fault in the leaders of the Assamese agitation. But the violent suppression by the Indian

state, moral support for this suppression by CPM, and criticism of a lack of perfection in the Assamese leaders by liberals and progressives around the country can hardly solve the problem. At the same time, we think the Assamese problem can be solved. However, the solution does not lie in expelling "foreigners" on the basis of setting dates like 1951, 1961 and 1971 as the demarcation point.

A FRAMEWORK FOR SEEKING SOLUTION

The principle of solving the problem ought to be respect for the national, cultural and political rights of the Assamese people and to ensure that the Assamese people are never reduced to a minority in their own homeland. In fact, they must remain an overwhelming majority. This majority could be 75% or some other approximate figure that can be established after some investigation. Before dealing with the issue of how this can be achieved and maintained, we wish to say that these principles ought to be applicable to other regions, areas and states also where the nationality question exists. Our central theme is that the solution to the Assamese problem does not lie in attempting to find dates to characterize "foreigners" but finding an economic and political basis. National cultures are suppressed not by migrant workers but by invading bureaucrats, big businesses and educated elites.

A general approach towards arriving at this safeguard is outlined below:

1. The first language in Assam cannot be anything but one of the Assamese languages. The Assamese people should decide which one of the many Assamese languages can take this place. Bengali cannot be allowed to be the first language in Assam in any type of educational institution or bureaucracy. The second and link language could be English, which though not a native language is also not the language of any given section of Indian people as is the case with Hindi and Bengali.

Such a provision would create conditions for the Bengali elite and bureaucrats to either respect Assamese language and culture or depart. It might be added that such a reluctance to learn Assamese or chauvinism for their own style is not a characteristic of workers who moved from Orissa or Bihar to make a living in Assam.

2. All non-Assamese landlords must be expelled from Assam. As for the Assamese landlords, a struggle of the Assamese people in its own course is the solution.

3. Most of the non-Assamese bureaucrats, educationists and big businesses must be forced to leave Assam. What should be the cutoff point for this should be based on investigations of the Assamese and non-Assamese population so that the completion of this process ensures a substantial Assamese majority in Assam. Steps should be taken in the future to ensure that non-Assamese businesses and establishments are subject to a certain ceiling.

4. Preference should be given in various jobs and positions to the Assamese.

5. No non-Assamese police or paramilitary force should be maintained in Assam or sent to Assam.

Perhaps other details need to be worked out and put in practice.

Reader Upset by January Issue

I did not know a new publication will dip so low in its publication standards? Get the views of some readers, invite their opinion and what they want to see. This was a sickly issue!

Communal Riots in Baroda

Not for the front page. You are not helping but fanning the little fire!

Policeman firing at Sikh demonstrators

The picture gives the impression as if

demonstrators are lined up against some wall before the firing squad. What purpose does it achieve except to fan the communal flames abroad too?

Vinoba: A View

I ... question the caliber of the writer who had the nerve to call Samadhi as plain & simple suicide.

Bhatnagar

Las Vegas

IMMIGRANT NEWS

Pizza Workers' Support Committee Celebrates Victory



Some of the 23 Indian Pizzaworkers who were reinstated in their jobs on Dec. 13, 1982, with wage increases at the Canadian Pizza Crust Ltd. in Mississauga, Toronto. A support committee for the workers helped them in their struggle.

The Support Committee organized a potluck dinner as a celebration of their victory in getting their jobs back. About 50 people attended this function and thoroughly enjoyed themselves.

The film 'A Time to Rise' was screened and it was highly appreciated by everyone. This film, which has been banned in India, is another example of a working class struggle of Indians in Canada very similar to the pizzaworkers' experience. IPANA member, Gurmeet Kang, congratulated the women and other members of the Support Committee who had been involved in the struggle for reinstatement. He also said that IPANA members who had worked actively in this struggle would continue to extend support in other similar actions in the future. Balkir Kaur, one of the pizzaworkers, ex-

pressed thanks to all those who had worked within the committee with dedication and unity to achieve reinstatement. Marion Brydon from the NDP and Keith, a law student, who were members of the Committee also participated in the evening's celebration. Another committee member sang a moving Punjabi patriotic song.

All those present had a sumptuous meal made up of Indian delicacies most of which were made by the pizzaworkers themselves. The evening was also marked by a lively gidda dance by the women themselves accompanied by songs and music. Altogether the evening was memorable in the warmth and unity which the participants generated. For more information, contact IPANA-Toronto, Box 1135, Stn B Weston, Ontario, M91 2Q8.

Workers Fired

(continued from page 1)

committee to support Delta Plating Workers. The committee immediately contacted Employment Standards Office of the provincial government, the Human Rights Commission of Ontario, and the media. Also through their contacts in the legislature, the committee requested the leader of NDP, Bob Ray, to raise the question in the legislature. The Labor Minister of Ontario, Ramsey, replied that he had begun a departmental investigation.

In February 18, a combined investigation by the Ontario Human Rights Commission and the Employment Standards Office was carried out. They interviewed all the workers and investigated their complaint against Delta Plating. The preliminary report shows that the company in fact owes over \$10,000 in overtime pay to the workers. The owner has been instructed to pay up within a week.

The community committee is now trying to press the Employment Standards Office to order the owner to reinstate the workers since they were dismissed while asking for their legitimate wages; such dismissals are illegal, even when the workers are not unionized.

Now Unemployment Insurance has begun an investigation of its own into the owner's assertion that the workers left on their own.

The workers and the committee supporting them are determined to continue the fight until all workers are reinstated with full back-pay. The workers are also demanding that they be given proper safety equipment since they work with dangerous chemicals.

Kashmir Govt Assumes Powers to Ban Groups, Gag Press

The government of Jammu and Kashmir has assumed blanket powers under the Criminal Law Amendment Ordinance, 1983, and two others announced on the same day.

The government now has the power to ban certain organizations believed to be "communal." The Law Minister of the state has justified the ordinance by referring to "the forces responsible for the partition of the country." Critics feel that there are already laws to meet the challenge of communal organizations and nothing is gained by banning them.

Under one ordinance, the government has assumed anti-Press powers with which it can close down a newspaper. Restrictions have been placed on access to courts by the aggrieved newspaper.

The third ordinance relates to measures against corruption among public servants and legislators.

General elections are due in the state soon.

INDIA NOW MARCH 1983

Housing Bylaw for Farmworkers Sought After Near-Miss Fire

by RICK OUSTON

The British Columbia government's refusal to apply its own legislation or to approve municipal bylaws setting out livable housing standards for Fraser Valley farmworkers, came close to claiming the lives of six workers in a cattle barn fire, the Canadian Farmworkers Union has charged.

The Matsqui workers were awakened in a barn early in the morning of February 1 only when a tire exploded from the heat, the union said in a letter to Health Minister Jim Nielsen. The barn did not have smoke alarms, according to the assistant fire chief. "They lost everything," he said of the farmworkers.

Matsqui council passed a bylaw last year that required the use of smoke alarms and set general cleanliness levels for kitchens and bathrooms, exits, windows, and a minimum clearance between

walls and rooms, but the BC health department has refused to authorize the bylaw. Without the province's approval, Matsqui can't do anything, said Matsqui's building inspection services manager, who was in charge of drawing up the bylaw.

The province has its own law, the Industrial Camp Act, setting forth minimum living area and conditions. However the province has never enforced it for farmworkers' housing.

"Why," the union letter asked, "in 1983, are British Columbia farmworkers still living in fire-trap barns, chicken coops and tool sheds?"

Richard Bassett, Nielsen's executive assistant, asked that question in a telephone interview, refused to comment.

Is the department of health doing anything to improve the living conditions?

"I can't answer that," he said.

IWA(GB) Campaigns Against Dowry System In India

An article entitled "Fight Back Against Bride Burning and Dowry System in India" in the February issue of Lalkar, a publication of Indian Workers Association (Great Britain), has described the oppression of women, in particular of newly wed brides, by their in-laws all over India. The article has also praised the struggles waged by women and others in India against bride burning and the dowry system.

The article supports the demand for (i) strict implementation of the present Dowry Prohibition Act, (ii) drawing up of a new Dowry Prohibition Act, (iii) compulsory registration of all marriages with declaration of all assets given to the bride and bridegroom, (iv) compulsory investigation of all deaths of women within 10 years of their marriage, and finally (v) most severe penalty for all those involved in bride burning and dowry deaths.

GURSHARAN SINGH TO VISIT CANADA

The well-known Punjabi dramatist Gursharan Singh has accepted an invitation from the Indian Peoples Association in North America (IPANA) to visit Canada this May.



Gursharan Singh

Gursharan Singh, who has been the leader of the Amritsar Natak Kala Kendra for the last 20 years, is the author of approximately 150 plays in Punjabi. His group travels from village to village, performing before 150,000 people each year. Its success in bringing to the villages plays depicting the sacrifices of Sikh Gurus in present-day context has inspired the creation of 17 similar drama troupes in Punjab. Singh organized a cultural festival in March of 1982 from which emerged the Punjab Lok Sabha Charak Manch (Punjab People's Cultural Front). Singh was arrested during the Emergency for performing "From Chandini Chowk to Sirhand," a play dealing with the sacrifices of Sikh Gurus.

Gursharan Singh and his seven-member drama company will begin their visit to North America in Vancouver. They will perform there before going on to Calgary, Edmonton, Winnipeg, Toronto, Montreal, and possibly some other Canadian cities. The Punjabi Literary Association will host the eight in Edmonton, and the Punjabi Literary and Cultural Association will be their Winnipeg sponsor.

For more information on the visit, call Harindar Mahil at (604) 588-0002 in Vancouver, or in Toronto call Tania Das Gupta at (416) 690-1204 or Gurmit Kang at (416) 792-2500.

Newsletter on Development Projects in India

A bimonthly newsletter on development efforts in India, Development Update, has recently been announced. It brings together current thinking about development efforts as expounded in leading Indian journals and news weeklies as well as presents the work of development groups. The annual subscription is \$5; write to Shashi Ranjan Pandey, 1500 Johnson Drive, Madison, WI 53706.

IPANA Joins Vancouver Peace Demonstration



A view of the Vancouver demonstration

by SATINDER SIDHU

More than 500 people joined a peace demonstration on February 19 in Vancouver to protest nuclear weapons - particularly the proposed testing of US cruise missiles in Alberta, Canada, and the recent US-Canada umbrella agreement permitting such weapons testing.

The demonstrators prepared their own statement - a large scroll of newspaper bearing signatures, drawings and cartoons. It will be sent those working with the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament in Europe. Speakers at the rally condemned both superpowers for producing more and more nuclear weapons.

The demonstration was organized by an anti-nuclear coalition, joined by the Vancouver unit of IPANA and the British Columbia Organization to Fight Racism.

WOMEN

Muslim Woman MP Wants to End Polygamy

RASHEEDA BAGHAT

"It is high time that we brought reforms in the Muslim personal law first of all to do away with polygamy, so that we can stop the misuse and misapplication of the personal law not only by Muslim men but also men of other religions to marry a second wife," says Noorjehan Razack, AIADMK MP in Rajya Sabha and a practicing advocate.

She had made a statement in Rajya Sabha some time back requesting the central government to stop the exploitation of Muslim women, especially in marriage and divorce, by enacting a common civil code applicable to all communities including Christians, Muslims, Parsis and Sikhs.

"A large section of Muslim women is for this change. No married woman wants her husband to have a second, third or fourth wife. The common opposition to this reform is that the Shariat permits a man to have four wives. But a man makes the law according to his environment and circumstances and no wise man could allow the law to overrule him. In those days when polygamy was allowed the reasons were different. There were so many wars and a man married so many times in different places, 10 wives or 100 wives. So to limit that number, only four wives were allowed. But times have changed now. It is no secret that once a man has a second wife, the first wife becomes nothing more than a slave and she can't even question the ill-treatment because it is so easy for the Muslim man to give her talaq (divorce)."

Razack fails to understand why the Indian government should hesitate to reform the Muslim personal law. "Is it not the duty of the government to look after the interests of the minority communities, keeping the secular character in view?" she asked in Rajya Sabha. Reforms had been made in Islamic countries like Turkey, Tunisia, Indonesia and Pakistan. In

Indonesia, a man had to fulfil certain conditions. In Pakistan, a man wanting a second wife had to get prior permission from the Arbitration Counsel.

Another change which could be brought about to benefit Muslim women was an increase in the mahar (the amount a husband gives his wife at the time of marriage and which she can claim at the time of divorce). "What happens now is that the amount given in most marriages is ridiculously low. If it was to be relevantly high a man would think not twice but ten times before giving talaq. Then there is the inheritance of the wife. The law must be suitably amended to give the wife and children equal share in the husband's property."

A change would also have to come in the attitude of the Muslims themselves regarding the education of women, their going out to work, etc. "Today, even in well-to-do families we find that Muslims are rather reluctant to send their daughters for higher education."

Razack at least is one woman who has not thought it fit to curtail her daughters' education. While one of her daughters is doing medicine, the other is in B.Com.



Demonstration by the Progotishil Mahila Samiti (Progressive Women's Organization) in support of Amina Khatoon.

Tragic Case of Amina Khatoon

DOLORES CHEW

On the night of July 28 1982, Amina Khatoon, a 22-year-old woman working as a domestic in Calcutta, was returning home with her young child after work at 11 PM. She lost her way. This is not unusual as women are usually only acquainted with their own locality, and she had just got a new job. She found her way to Nimta police station and asked the policemen for help in getting home. However she was locked up and till 2 AM she was raped successively by the officer-in-charge, the sub-inspector and his assistant. Her child was a witness to this. Then they gave her Rs 2 and released her.

Amina was quite hysterical and incoherent by now. She wandered around mumbling, "They did it to me, they did it to me." She was picked up by two night watchmen who thought they could help her by taking her to the local police station. When they reached the station Amina's agitation increased. The officer-in-charge had gone to sleep and the policemen said they would look after her. They took Amina to the roof and locked her in a room there.

Later that night, the watchmen met a man who was coming off the night shift. The man being a community leader was appraised by the guards of the night's occurrences, including their encounter with a "mad woman." The man made them re-

peat their story. Nimta police station is notorious in Calcutta, and when he was told what the "mad woman" had been mumbling his suspicions were aroused.

He immediately went with the two watchmen to the station and demanded to see the woman. The police denied they held anyone of that description. Voices were raised and Amina hearing the commotion broke the door of her room, rushed down the stairs and very coherently described the horrors to which she had been subjected at the hands of the guardians of the law.

The community leader left the police station and roused women from that locality from their slumber. Five hundred women surrounded the police station in a couple of hours and staged a dharna demanding the arrest of the guilty sub-inspector and his accomplices. The Progotishil Mahila Samiti (progressive women's group) took up the case with the help of the Association for the Protection of Democratic Rights.

The CPM government in Bengal promised the women justice. The policemen concerned were suspended.

The Samiti and APDR demanded justice for Amina Khatoon. They demanded compensation for her for the rest of her life, because of the stigma with which she would have to live, and they demanded that the police personnel responsible be punished.

The CPM government promised that Amina Khatoon would receive justice. The policemen concerned were arrested. Meanwhile, local CPM activists pleaded that the issue not be blown up as it would contribute to the destabilizing efforts of the central government aimed at the Marxist government of Bengal.

When everything was quiet, the policemen were released and Amina Khatoon was arrested on the charge of being an illegal refugee from Bangladesh. There are thousands of such persons in Calcutta alone. Amina now languishes in jail with her child and is liable to be forgotten, like so many others.

The Progotishil Mahila Samiti and APDR are trying to their best to get her released.

Pramila Dandavate on Laws to Help Women

"Our Mythology Should Be Rewritten"

BULBUL PAL

Q. Mrs Dandavate, what does India's exceptionally low sex-ratio - 935 women to 1,000 men - mean to you?

A. It's a direct indication of their poor social status. Girls receive less care and therefore have a far higher mortality rate. The rate of maternal deaths during childbirth is also high, and women are not free to decide how many children to have. Female life is dispensable, and female infanticide has now resurfaced in the form of female feticide, or selective abortion of female fetuses. This is dangerous in a country where abortion is legally easy.

Q. There seems to be a historical-cultural bias against women in Indian society. Tulsidas, for instance, said in a famous stanza that women, drums, shudras and morons are all objects fit to be beaten.

A. Tulsidas deserves little respect. Indian men's attitudes have been seasoned by our ancient mythology and literature: in the Ramayana, when others criticized Sita, Rama should have put Lakshmana on the throne and accompanied Sita. In our culture, if a man sacrifices his wife and children for some cause, he is praised, but for a woman to do such a thing is a crime.

The ideals set before Indian women are wrong: Savitri is famous not because she was intellectually brilliant but only for her pati-vrata. Lofty respect is given

to Draupadi, not because she was the brain behind so much that happened but because she served five husbands.

DOWRY DEATHS

A Bill of mine pertains to dowry; we demanded that if a woman dies within five years of marriage, it should be treated and investigated as a murder case, and that the body of the woman is not to be disposed of without her parents' permission.

I feel that if parents are forced to give their daughters their share of property, there will be no need for dowry. I think also that whatever is given to a woman at the time of her marriage should be registered, with the condition that it cannot be disposed of without the court's consent, and that in case a woman dies within five years of marriage, it should

out courageously on behalf of Muslim women is Noorjehan Razack from Tamil Nadu.

EASIER DIVORCE

Unless conditions are created in which women get equal property in practice, unless women can get jobs immediately after divorce, unless alternatives are provided, how many women will seek divorce? What applies to the West does not necessarily apply to the conditions Indian women live in. Unfortunately, even women lawyers sometimes do not understand that such a law [allowing divorce for "irretrievable breakdown" of a marriage] will only become an additional instrument in the hands of men wishing to get rid of their matrimonial responsibilities easily.

Pramila Dandavate, 54, is a Member of Parliament and an activist in the women's movement. She has introduced a number of Bills in Parliament such as the Dowry Prohibition Act (Amendment) Bill and the Registration of Marriages Act. In a recent interview, she spoke at length on the social status of women in this country and the reforms which are necessary. Some excerpts.

revert to her parents or to her child. Also, I think politicians demanding and accepting dowry should be disqualified from getting tickets for elections.

MUSLIM WOMEN

Q. What about legislation for Muslim women? Apparently, women in Pakistan and other Muslim countries enjoy more equality than Muslim women here.

A. As long as the government keeps thinking of Muslim votes, Muslim women will continue to suffer. I have asked only woman Muslim MP why educated Muslim women do not raise their voices at least against oral talaq. Her reply was that their own husbands might give them oral talaq. The only woman MP who has come

COURTS AND POLICE

Q. Would the setting up of more family courts and giving cognizance to offenses like dowry be desirable steps?

A. More family courts will give priority to family cases and settle them quickly. Just now, some domestic matters are taken up by courts that also try murder and other such cases; hence women are inhibited from approaching courts.

As for giving cognizance to dowry, matters should not be placed in the hands of the police beyond a point, as this will lead to one ore way of making corrupt money. What is needed is to give women's social welfare organizations more powers.



Pramila Dandavate

Q. What sort of powers?

Powers such as being able to file cases in court on behalf of distressed women. ... If women's organizations were to be given statutory powers, and locus standi in courts, they could help to prevent deaths instead of merely trying to bring culprits to book later on. If social awakening is to come about in women, it is only the militant women's organizations which can make it happen.

INCREASED AWARENESS

Despite the basic awareness of women's social status, I only realized how bad things really were when I read the report of the Committee on the Status of Women in jail during the Emergency. Before the Emergency, the tendency was merely to fight against the price rise and so on. The report put new concepts in my head.

If there is a sugar lobby, a farmers' lobby, scheduled caste and scheduled tribe lobbies, then why not a women's lobby? Women are the largest minority and the most exploited one of all.

(from the Indian Express)

A Day Like Any Other

A Woman's Reverie

DOLORES CHEW

When will this bus appear? Whenever I am in a rush it seems to take such a long time coming. I had to work overtime at the factory because we need the extra money. My husband has been unemployed for several months. Often we eat dal and roti with some achar.

I've been here fifteen minutes now and yet no bus. Same old story at the factory today. It's so hot in there, I think I'll die every time I walk in the door. But I survive and come back again the next day. Tell me what can I do? And the supervisor — so, so rude. Treats us like machines, as if we are not made of flesh and blood. Today, what with all the overtime and all I was so exhausted I sat down in the washroom for a few minutes and she was banging on the door. "What do you think you're doing? Do you think you're on your lunch break?"

This morning as we were entering the factory there were some union activists handing out leaflets urging us to form a union and improve our conditions. I'm not against unions. I know what the boss says — that unions are communist. I don't care. But we're all so scared. If we lose our jobs what are we going to do? None of us speaks English well. Our families will suffer. We need our jobs. Whenever anyone complains that it's too hot or something like that, the manager shouts, "Have you come here to work or relax. Next you will be asking for airconditioners. You should be glad I gave you a job. There are hundreds out there waiting for work."

Two days ago my daughter was ill. I had to stay up all night with her. I could hardly rise in the morning, but I dragged myself to work. I was too scared of being fired.

What a life, what a life. When I came abroad I thought everything would be better, but it's all worse. Whenever I get

depressed I think of my village. It all seems so long ago, so distant. I was so happy then. I worked and helped my mother, but every day the sun shone. Nobody seemed to rush. Our home was small and made of mud but we sat outside on the charpoy a lot. All the women would get together in the evenings and sing songs. On the way to the well in the mornings we would all gossip. We never felt lonely. Here we live in boxes all on top of one another, and no one seems to care.

I am constantly getting burned at work, though I am careful. But when I get home I cannot rest for even a minute. Children are fighting, house has to be cleaned, food has to be cooked. All these years my husband has never cooked a single dish. And he always wants his rotis hot! Sometimes it all gets so unbearable I cry. I try not to let the children see.

No bus. I wish I could get into a taxi just for once. For once without thinking of the expense. Even though I am out of the factory I can hear the noise of the machines. Even at night in my dreams I hear them. My body can't stop shaking from the vibrations of the machine. I wish there was someone to turn to. I wish I could talk to somebody. But who? Everybody has their own problems.

Today there was a big row at work. As we were going out the manager tried to stop one of the workers. He said she had stolen things. She said she had not. He did not listen and turned her bag inside out. There was nothing. But it was so humiliating. I wish we could do something. He treats us like his slaves. In a way I guess we are. We do what he tells us, because we need our jobs. But I wish this wasn't so.

Ah! the bus comes — and it's not crowded. I can rest my feet. Maybe even take a nap. Maybe ...

March 8 is International Women's Day

Women Seek Positive Portrayal in Films

Scene: Boy meets girl in typical Hindi film. The reluctant heroine is chased, pawed and mauled by the determined hero. She says "no" but the hero persists, confident that every woman enjoys that caveman approach that her "no" is actually a "yes". After a couple of songs and some rough handling, the heroine lives up to the male myth. She says "yes".

More than any other medium, perhaps, the Hindi film has successfully straitjacketed and packed women into convenient stereotyped roles, be it a shrew, a self-sacrificing housewife, a promiscuous working girl or a more decoration piece for her husband. Women activists are trying for a more positive portrayal of women in the Indian media as thinking being capable of handling their lives rather than as passive objects of male domination, violence and lust.

"Hindi films give women only one aim in life — marriage" declared Bina Agarwal, a reader in Economics in Delhi University. "If the woman is anything else but a housewife, then she is portrayed as promiscuous, immoral, and bad."

Apart from the perpetuation of traditional roles for both men and women, Hindi films cater to a lot of male myths about women. They presume women to be preoccupied with themselves, with shopping, with jewelry, with anything petty and mundane. "They are shown as shrews, nags, intolerant, incapable of understanding anything beyond themselves and their home", Nalini Singh said. "Maybe, some women are like that. But there are hundreds more who are not."

"For our films, a woman's worth lies in her body," Kamala Bhasin pointed out. "Every film has a major dance sequence in which the dancer shows off her curves. Even when the heroine sings a lullaby to her child, she makes eyes at the man in

the audience. And look at the song sequences — they are full of naked suggestive sex and this is what Chittrahar, brings right into our homes."

One of the major objections all three had to the films is open aggression against women. As Agarwal said, the first meeting of the hero and the heroine is almost always violent — they bump into each other, they have an accident, etc. And the woman is generally the loser, the man assuming a dominating role right from the start. From then on, the heroine is pinched, slapped, teased, insulted, kicked around and pawed. And in spite of all this, she says "yes" to the hero.

"All this contributes to the humiliation women face on the roads, just like the ostentatious living they show in films contributes to increasing dowry demands on a new bride", Ms. Bhasin said.

Adoor Gopalakrishnan Honored by British Film Institute

Movie director Adoor Gopalakrishnan from Kerala was recently given the highest award by the British Film Institute for his film "Elippathayam" (rat trap). The movie is centered around the struggles of a woman caught in the feudal system of Kerala. Gopalakrishnan is the second Indian film maker after Satyajit Ray to be cited by the Institute.

FILM TO BE SHOWN IN NY

Elippathayam will be shown in the New Directors Series at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City on March 27. For the first time in the series, two Indian films will be shown this year. The other film is Padmarajan's *There Once Was a Wrestler*, which won an award at a film festival in Malaysia in 1982.

Research on Wife-Beating

It is high time that the women's movement in India took up seriously the issue of violence in the family — the problem of husbands beating their wives, according to Flavia D'Mello from the Feminist Resources Center, Bombay, who participated in a seminar on Atrocities on Women held in Madras recently. She deplored the tendency of the victim's family and society to either coax or cajole the woman to put up with the beating for a variety of reasons.

FRC surveyed fifty wives in Bombay, 25 from the middle classes and 25 from the working classes. Ages ranged from 16 to 65 and educational background from illiteracy to a postgraduate degree. The survey exploded the myth that middle class women or those from educated families did not get beaten. The women had husbands who were lawyers, journalists, public prosecutors, executives and successful businessmen. The monthly incomes of the families ranged from Rs 150 to Rs 5,000.

Says D'Mello: "When the middle class women were beaten for the first time they were numb with shock. Every woman interviewed said, 'I did not know that educated men beat their wives.' They had not seen wife-beating in their parents' homes (except in one case). Their initial reaction was to deny it even to themselves and said the shame and humiliation of the first beating had left a permanent scar on their psyche. They became silent, withdrawn and did not confide in anyone; the reluctance to confide ranging from a few weeks to five years. After the initial shock they began to question themselves and wonder if there was something wrong with their behavior, upbringing or education. They tried to change their behavior, actions and even their mode of dress to please their husbands and in-laws but the beatings continued."

Many women had tried to leave their husbands, going to stay with their parents or friends but were coaxed to return and that too on the husband's terms. The women who returned were totally disillusioned. "They lose their freedom, individuality and self-esteem. Dreams and hopes are shattered and life becomes a mere existence often for the sake of the children. The family and friends rejoice because the couple is reunited or the 'woman has learnt to adjust'. But nothing changed; the beatings continued. Only the women gradually learned to accept

the violence as something that was inevitable, and a part of their lives."

D'Mello classifies the beatings into three phases: the tension-building period, the explosion — acute battering, and the calm loving respite. The first phase is summed up in the words of a victim: "I know when a fight is coming. It is preceded by small fights over nothing and I get really tense then. I try to stay out of his way and try to do the right things. But despite that the fights, the small beatings start. And I just know that a big beating is going to come. I know because it is the pattern each time in the past 15 years. And often rather than live under this tension I hope for the beating to come soon so it could be calm and peaceful after that."

The second or the acute battering phase lasts for a couple of hours. The total lack of control and destructiveness distinguishes this phase. He starts with wanting to teach the woman a lesson and stops when she has learnt one. Every move of the woman, if she cries, screams, is silent or tries to escape from the beatings or remains still, excites him further. Said one victim: "Initially I used to be ashamed to cry and he used to beat me saying I will beat you until you cry out in pain. Later on when I would scream as the battering started, he used to beat me saying, I will beat you till you stop screaming."

The ending of phase two and the beginning of three is a welcome feature to both parties. It is associated with kindness and love; at this stage the woman's victimization is complete and the man knows he has gone too far. He decides that he has taught her a lesson and will never again touch her. What is surprising is that the woman believes this too, thinking that basically her husband is a good man, and outside elements — like alcohol, frustration at work, etc. — are to be blamed.

The remedial measures which are needed for women who decide to break away are free legal aid, a place to stay and a job. There should be homes for battered women which should be linked with agencies which could find these women employment. Allotment of a certain percentage for battered women in government housing schemes and hostels with common kitchens for women with children are also necessary, according to D'Mello.

Bengal Girls Sold after Marriage

PURABI S THAPA

Sixteen-year-old Mansura Khatoon of Kantagarh village in Hooghly was "wedded" and whisked away by a Muslim youth from Aligarh some time last July. After a few days the West Bengal police rescued her from a place in Haryana where she was about to be sold to a Yemeni sheikh along with two other girls for Rs 77,000.

On November 22, Purnima Das of 24 Parganas was rescued by the state police from Moradabad. She too had been kidnapped and sold into the flesh trade.

A confidential police report says that in 1981 the total number of missing women in West Bengal was 2,089; only 1,639 have been traced. In the first half of 1982, 728 adults and 691 minors were reported missing. Only 524 adults and 486 minors could be traced. Thousands are still reported missing.

Gandhi Nominated for 11 Oscars

Richard Attenborough's *Gandhi* has been nominated for 11 academy awards, the highest number. *Gandhi*, which is competing with *Tootsie*, *E.T.*, and *Sophie's Choice*, has been nominated for best picture, best actor, best director, best costume design, best original score, etc. Earlier, *Gandhi* won 5 Golden Globe awards.

Gandhi is the second movie shot in India after Mahboob Khan's *Mother India* to be nominated for an Oscar.

Of the women who have thus disappeared, more than a fourth are prey to the marriage-cum-marketing racket. UP is the place most end up.

Uttarani Haldar, 14, of 24 Parganas was rescued from Bareilly. She was whisked away while on her way to school and "married" to a shopkeeper who disposed of her for a sum of Rs 2,500. Her "husband" has since been arrested. According to the police, the price for minor girls varies from Rs 2,500 to Rs 3,000. They claim that so far more than 150 girls from West Bengal have been exported to Bareilly and surrounding areas.

In July, the Hooghly police nabbed two kingpins of this racket. One of them was Roshanlal Upadhyay, a UP Brahmin.

Many more women are fooled into the flesh trade with a promise to make them stars in films. In a recent raid in Bombay, seven such women from West Bengal were rescued.

The market also includes women from neighboring countries like Nepal and Bangladesh. A few months ago, the Calcutta police rescued a number of girls from Bangladesh who were about to be sold off to men in Dubai.

The main cause for the girls' victimization appears to be their poverty. In the majority of cases, the parents are in a hurry to marry off their daughters (even minors) to the first man who appears on the horizon. According to the police, most of the "husbands" have local agents who get upwards of Rs 1,000 for each marriage.

No Golden Peacock at 9th International Film Festival Chokh gets Silver Peacock

The jury of the 9th International Film Festival held in New Delhi announced on January 17 that no film in the festival was worthy of the highest award, the Golden Peacock. Lindsay Anderson announced that the jury felt "obliged to record our disappointment at the general level of the films chosen this year for competition." The jury regretted that "in our judgement no film has shown the power of expression, the importance of theme or the originality of conception which would justify the award of the Golden Peacock, either for a short or a feature film."

Chokh, a Bengali movie on corruption and social injustice was awarded the Special Jury Prize (Silver Peacock). The movie is directed by Utpalendu Chakraborty. Chokh was the only Indian entry in the competition section of the festival.

Besides, a Soviet entry, Open Heart, got 2 silver peacocks — best director to Aleksei Pollikov and best actress to Marina Starikh; best actor award went to

Nourie-el Cherif for the Egyptian film, the Bus Driver.

The festival had a number of interesting films in the noncompetition section, including a widely acclaimed Turkish movie "Yol" on social and political repression guided from prison by film maker Guney, and Costa Gavras's "Missing" a co-winner of the Grand Prix at Cannes Film Festival.

There were about 150 films from 50 countries including 21 films in the competition section. A report in India Today blamed the poor organizing of the festival on the bureaucrats who have been increasingly interfering. The festival, which had a budget of \$600,000, is likely to result in a deficit of \$300,000 because of the lack of sale of tickets. Unlike festivals in the past, tickets for most movies were readily available. Previous festivals also lost money but not as much as this festival is feared to.

Richard Attenborough's film "Gandhi" has been acclaimed by many film critics in the west and has also won many awards. It has been nominated for the highest number of Oscars. Since the dubbed version in India was released only recently, public opinion there is not yet available. However, film critics and others in India who got an opportunity to see the movie have had mixed reactions. The project of making a film on Gandhi, since its inception, has been marred with controversies.

In this review, we are assuming that Gandhi is not a film on the Indian people's struggle for freedom from British colonial rule. It will be appropriate however to mention what we think are distortions and deliberate or innocent omissions. In the context of the film and this review, the question is not whether Gandhi's politics was correct or not but rather whether the film accurately presents Gandhi and his politics. Later, we also comment on some technical aspects of the movie.

Gandhi was the most dominant political leader of India in this century and one of the top political figures in the world. The film does seem to create an admiration for the mass consciousness of the Indian people against British Raj and for independence even if their active participation is ignored in the film. It is difficult to avoid feeling indignation at British rule after seeing the Jalianwala Bagh massacre in which over 1,500 people including women and children were butchered by a British General.

Gandhi was the first Indian leader to focus on the importance of the participation of the peasantry in any decisive struggle of the Indian people. During that period, only two leaders in colonial and semi-colonial countries recognized the significance of the peasantry in patriotic struggles — Gandhi and Mao. Needless to say the directions of the movements under these two leaders was by and large dissimilar but that is another issue. This view took the nationalist movement under Congress leadership from the elite to the masses, which alone makes Gandhi the most important political analyst of India. The film points this out through one speech that Gandhi made at an AICC convention but fails to show the evolution of his philosophy and how the movement engulfed the vast countryside of India with over 90% of the population.

Contrary to all other leaders of the Indian national movement, Gandhi alone saw the significance that the leader must attempt to live like the people whom he or she wishes to lead. This aspect of Gandhi is also shown in the movie though in exaggerated form, for despite all the simplicity in which Gandhi surrounded himself, an element of elitism continued to

dominate his life which also comes across in the movie even if Attenborough did not consciously mean to bring it out. Nevertheless, the very concept of living like the one you wish to serve is a highly significant quality and the only ones to practice this and rather admirably and sincerely since then have been many Sarvodaya workers and communists including the Naxalites.

Gandhi also had the unique ability not shown by any other leader of the Indian National Congress or the independence movement to concretize mass sentiment into simple slogans understandable to masses. Not only this, he had the ability to devise forms of action in which everyone — men, women and children from different strata — could participate. This is shown to some extent in the film, for example, his call for active non-cooperation, boycott of British goods, making salt or goods of daily use permitted widespread participation and the feeling and enthusiasm among the people that they were active fighters for independence.

Besides all these, Gandhi had the perception of social problems — untouchability, discrimination against women, communalism, etc. He spoke against them, often made these aspects of his program look important. The film does describe these as the integral part of Gandhi's thinking. However, if Gandhi failed most in fulfilling any of his slogans, it is these. Also during the independence movement, despite his professed values of these aspects, Gandhi did not initiate any mass movement to rectify these errors of the society and undertake mass education. To this extent, the film is realistic because it does not show any activity of Gandhi relating to the fulfillment of these goals except his going on fast when communal riots engulfed to destroy India at a level never seen in Indian history.

An aspect of Gandhi, perhaps ingrained within the feudal culture, is undemocratic functioning. Gandhi uncompromisingly forced his will on the people and on the leaders of the Indian National Congress. If he did not wish Subhash Chandra Bose to be the president of INC, he got it done. If he wished a movement to be withdrawn because it did not go exactly as he wished, regardless of the mass participation and enthusiasm for that such as after Chauri Chaura, he forced his will. Until 1942-43, that is 4-5 years before India was declared independent, Gandhi had made his will the law of INC, a tradition that has not been abandoned by the subsequent leaders, be it Nehru or

Amol Palekar Criticizes NFDC for not Distributing Akriet

Amol Palekar, film star and director of the Marathi film Akriet, said that his film is not being allowed to enter international film festivals. The National Film Development Corporation (NFDC) is the "official agent" for the overseas distribution of Akriet. Palekar said that he was shocked to find that his film was not in

CHOKH'S DIRECTOR TALKS OF PROBLEMS WITH CENSORS

Chokh, which won the silver peacock award, had faced serious problems with the censors, like other movies in the past such as Nishant, Ankur, Akriet and An Indian Story. Director Utpalendu Chakraborty told reporters in New Delhi on January 9 that the censors had insisted on 3 major changes or cuts but the film was ultimately passed with only 1 change.

The censors had objected for instance to a dialog on how officers had complete power during the emergency, a scene showing the calendar with the month of Dec 1975, and a camera shot of a newspaper with the headline that Emergency was to continue.

Chokh is Chakraborty's second feature. His first film, a short called Mukti Chai, was on civil liberties and political prisoners. The film is available from IPANA.

Nehru's daughter Indira Gandhi who is the most vulgar expression of this arbitrariness, undemocratic functioning and favoritism. The film makes a virtue of this habit of Gandhi by attempting to present this arbitrary functioning as adherence to principles.

Was Gandhi as stubborn to British rulers as to Indian leaders and people? Even a cursory study of Indian history of

the market section of the 9th international film festival held in Delhi. He had protested to NFDC but had not gotten any response.

Palekar's film earlier had problems first with the Censor Board and later with the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. Palekar saw in this move of NFDC another attempt to suppress the screening of Akriet. Earlier V.P. Sathe, the former minister for Information and Broadcasting had tried to prevent the film from being sent abroad on the ground that it did not project a proper image of the Indian society.

Palekar commented that these obstacles created by the government only showed how difficult it was to make an honest film. "Even after a film is cleared with the Censor Board, attempts are made to suppress it if the government is not happy with its theme. My own view is that the govt wants only escapist films and all this talk about socially relevant films is only slogan mongering."

In a related development, organizers of the screening of Suhasini Mulay's documentary, An Indian Story, at the Southern Asian Institute of Columbia University in New York City, got threatening phone calls from the Indian consulate in New York.

their distinctive personality, whereas important Indian leaders (except for Gokhale) including Nehru, Azad, Patel, etc., appear as caricatures not having any personality of their own. In the movie, they are shown as meek followers of Gandhi but history tells us that they had their own ways of thinking. Jinnah is depicted to be villainous from the very beginning. Further, almost all leaders of INC were aristocrats, why Jinnah alone is presented like that. The movie does not have BR Ambedkar and other important leaders; even JP, the most important Gandhian leader after Gandhi's death, is ignored.

The movie depicts Gandhi having warm relationships with many foreigners around him even including New York Times correspondent Walker, but his relationship with Indians, except may be for his wife Kasturba, is depicted without warmth.

The Jalianwala Bagh incident comes across as an aberration in British policy whereas it is well documented that it was a planned massacre. The Hunter Commission investigating Dwyer is depicted to be very humane and concerned about the lives of Indian people, which is again factually not correct. In most situations, British rulers are portrayed to be helpless. The communal riots are depicted so that the British colonial government's view is proven correct, which was that if India was given independence, it will lead to civil war and riots among various nationalities and religious communities. Nowhere is any mention of the role played by the Britishers to create splits between Hindu and Muslim leaders.

Granted the movie was made for international audience, depicting Gandhi at the beginning of the movie saying "Oh God, Oh God" when he is shot, instead of "Hey Ram, Hey Ram," which could have been subtitled, seems to us a major oversight on the part of the director. Further, Ram Dhun and other songs that go with his Sabarmati Ashram were not properly utilized. One of the reviewers felt at the end that he did not see an Indian movie.

In a PBS show, "The Making of Gandhi," it was mentioned that the Indian government provided Attenborough with all the help including units of army, navy and air force for the sequence of funeral procession. One wonders whether the government would have taken a similar attitude towards an Indian director.

Ben Kingsley acted extremely well as Gandhi though he did not age well at the end; Gandhi was frail and not that healthy as is depicted. Rohini Hattangady did a good job as Kasturba. Candice Bergen playing a Life correspondent and Martin Sheen a New York Times correspondent were given undue importance in the movie. The photography is good.

Gandhi and Attenborough's "Gandhi"

Daya R. Varma
Deepak Kapur

that period shows that he was most unwilling to displease the British while pressing for his demands. Whereas this aspect of Gandhi is depicted during his life in South Africa where the British themselves are shown to be helpless in the face of racism, it is not shown during his leadership in India. In the final analysis, Gandhi saw the demands of the Indian people to be good both for the British and Indians and approached the problem that way.

There are many aspects of Gandhi's life that show his weakness as a leader, as a fighter and as a human being. Such weaknesses, or at least some of them, are only to be expected. For example, after the Gandhi-Irwin pact, all nonviolent leaders were released and Bhagat Singh, perhaps as popular if not more than Gandhi during that period, and his colleagues were executed. Why was it that Gandhi had one view about the violence committed by the British and even the trivial manifestation of that by the suffering, oppressed and dominated Indian people so abhorrent. How is it that he had such noble views about Hindu-Muslim unity but universally favored Hindu leaders, opposed inter-caste and inter-religious marriages. If this was also part of Gandhi's character, why could it not be shown in the movie?

We think that part of the problem with the film is that the film maker does not wish to show Gandhi with his strengths and weaknesses but as a demigod which he was not. The film depicts Gandhi doing everything including fight for independence as a compulsive outcome of his personal virtues rather than one who plunged himself in the fight of the whole nation for emancipation. And one can ask was it so that for Gandhi, the nature and content of the movement he led was merely a means of letting his own feelings or was it that the problems of the Indian people and the need to fight for this shaped his life.

There are other technical flaws in the movie. Almost all foreigners, even including those who appear on the screen for few minutes, come across as humans with

Elections in Assam

(continued from page 1)

tragedy." She blamed the agitators for this tragedy and categorically denied any responsibility of her own. When asked if the killings would have occurred if her government had not called the elections, Gandhi said the current violence was not the first in the area. "It has been happening here since 1980." She also told reporters during her tour that the death toll had been exaggerated by newspapers. The government machinery initially attempted to give this view first. For instance, Indian Ambassador KR Narayanan appeared on ABC's Nightline and blamed the press for exaggerations.

In Gauhati, a general strike called by the students to protest Gandhi's visit was successful and markets and private offices were closed.

OPPOSITION DEMANDS GANDHI'S RESIGNATION

In Parliament, many opposition leaders accused the government for the killings because of its insistence on holding elections. Gandhi refused to accept the blame and rejected the opposition demand to step down. Janata party's Madhu Dandavate asserted that in any democratic country, the head of the government would have offered to resign in such a situation. He added that Gandhi was trying to retain her party's hold in Assam over the bodies of those killed.

Later Indira Gandhi was quoted by CBS radio to have reverted to her familiar line of accusing the foreign powers and especially the US for the situation in Assam. Gandhi reportedly said that there were forces in the world that did not like India's nonaligned foreign policy and they were interested in destabilizing the country.

VICTIMS BLAME GOVT FOR KILLINGS

Many of those whose families were affected by the violence have unequivocally blamed Gandhi's government for the lives of thousands. Ananta Das, a school teacher in Chamaria, asked, "How can they hold an election here after all this violence?" Mohammad Harjat from Bhagduba Habi area, whose home was destroyed in Feb. 18 attacks, said "If there had been no elections, our people would not have been slaughtered like an-

Opportunism of CPM and Its Allies

imals. We blame those who called the elections for those killings."

The leaders of the Assam movement have condemned the killings.

No reports mentioned of any arrests made in connection with the attacks or the establishment of a judicial or public inquiry or investigation into the matter.

ELECTION BOYCOTT SUCCESSFUL

Meanwhile the election boycott call given by the All Assam Student Union and the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP), which was supported by 3 opposition parties - BJP, Janata and Lok Dal - was successful. Although the exact figures are not available, many journalists and officials reported that polling was low, 15 to 25%. Many villages did not vote at all.

Gandhi's party won 78 seats in 91 races decided so far giving it an overwhelming majority in the assembly, which was a foregone conclusion. CPI and CPM had won only a few seats with more going to independents.

The government had to bring in over 5,000 officials from New Delhi and other states as local officials refused to cooperate. Over 20% of officials in Assam had already been suspended for refusing to do election work.

Over 70,000 paramilitary troops and 20,000 extra policemen have been deployed to maintain peace during the voting, but even the authorities concede they were not able to contain the situation.

ELECTIONS A FRAUD

An editorial entitled "Fraud in Assam" in the Jan 29 issue of the Economic and Political Weekly, said: "Under the guise of 'constitutional compulsions' and 'democratic rectitude', an enormous fraud is being perpetrated in Assam where in conditions, which the Chief Election Commissioner has himself conceded are far from normal, elections are being sought..." It goes on to say, "Paramilitary forces of the center as well as armed

constabularies from other states have now been drafted to maintain law and order in view of the presumed unreliability of the police forces in Assam itself in performing this routine task. The cities and towns of Assam, especially those in the Brahmaputra valley, have become virtual armed camps. Gauhati's streets are constantly and relentlessly patrolled by these armed personnel; there is a premium on not being an Assamese during the evening hours on the streets of Gauhati. The Republic Day parade was held in Gauhati in the midst of a 'Janata Curfew' called by the leadership of the agitation with only the officials attending and being made to sign an attendance register. The parade, marked by a show of tanks, 76 mm mountain guns 105 mm field guns and other armaments, was itself turned into a blatant display of military muscle against the citizens."

About the constitutional dilemma faced by the Gandhi government, the editorial commented: "On the face of it the argument that the elections have to be held ... before March 18, 1983, when Assam would have completed a year under President's rule, does sound credible. But how can and why should one overlook the fact that between Dec 1980 when Congress(I) ministry under Anwara Taimur was inducted to office and March 1982 when another Congress(I) ministry under Keshub Gogoi resigned and President's rule was imposed, the same constitutional provisions were grossly and most cynically abused merely to enable the center not to take a firm and clear stand on the Assam agitation?"

HELD TO BOOST IMAGE AFTER DEBACLE IN SOUTH

The EPW editorial attributed the decision to hold elections to Gandhi's pressing need to restore her and her party's shattered image following the debacle in the elections to the state assemblies of Andhra and Karnataka last month. "It is the desire and the calculation that a considerable section of the electorate in the Brahmaputra valley would abstain from the polls and thus ensure the victory of

her party by default that has influenced the decision to hold elections."

CPI AND CPM'S OPPORTUNISM EXPOSED

CPI and CPM and their left and democratic allies are the only parties participating in the elections beside Congress(I). Had these parties also refrained from participating, Indira Gandhi's plans would have been demolished. Obviously it would have been extremely difficult for Gandhi to have proceeded with her plans for elections because then they would not be anything but a farce given that Congress(I) would be the only party participating. This is what happened in 4 constituencies - Boko, Palasbari, Pathacharkuchi in Kamrup district and Mangaldoi in Darrang district - where there was no one except Congress(I) contesting.

Earlier, there were reports of police firing and curfew being imposed in many parts of Assam. Over 175 lawyers were arrested on Feb 2 while protesting the holding of elections but were ordered released by the Gauhati High court. The court also accepted for a hearing a petition by 6 citizens charging the police and the paramilitary Central Reserve Police force with harassment. Jyotisha Barua, the chief reporter of the major Assamese-language daily Dainik Assam, alleged that he was manhandled by a CRPF patrol Jan 31. The Supreme Court had earlier stayed the operation of censorship imposition on Assam press by the central government.

The Gauhati High court also days ordered the release of student leaders held in detention under National Security Act. The leaders of AASU and AAGSP had been arrested when they returned from Delhi to Gauhati after the negotiations between them and the government broke down.

ELECTION RESULTS IN MEGHALAYA

In Meghalaya, no party emerged with a clear majority in the 60-member assembly. Congress(I) won 25 seats and most of the remaining seats were taken by two regional parties. Different sides were reported to be considering negotiations to form a coalition.

Walking By

HARI SHARMA

Walking by is difficult. The sight hurts. The loud wail hurts. The way she bangs her head on the concrete. For a few pennies.

It is difficult. But I have to walk by.

A hard day it was. In the office. Lot of work. The head clerk was angry. And the bus was crowded. Hot. It is late. The children should be home. And I have to buy some vegetables. Will the landlord come again tonight? The rent wasn't paid last month.

Wish she wasn't doing all this. Banging her head on the concrete. What can I do? I must go home. Wish someone will do something. So the wailing would stop. Begging would stop. And the landlord would not threaten.



Photo by Hari Sharma

Delhi Slum Dwellers Fight Against Loan Sharks

Over 1200 people living in the slums of Delhi marched on Dec 21, last year, to the Boat Club to protest against the callous attitude of the local and central authorities to their problems. Unhygienic living conditions, physical and monetary harassment by money lenders, and connivance of the local authorities with loan sharks, threats of demolition of their huts—ments by Delhi Development Authority are only some of the problems faced by Delhi slum dwellers, very much like the slum dwellers in other major cities such as Calcutta, Bombay and Madras.

MONEY LENDERS RULE

There are nearly 350,000 slum dwellers in Delhi. They include footpath shopkeepers, mill workers, small repairmen and New Delhi Municipal Corporation (NDMC) sweepers. NDMC sweepers number nearly 42,000 and they live in 9 zones. In 4 of these zones, Karol Bagh, Pahargadh, Kingsway Camp and Civil Lines, operates the moneylending factory of one Saluja family. Saluja operates on a capital of nearly Rs 400,000. The usual interest rate is 20–25% per month which would come to 240–300% per year and more.

The story of two victims of Saluja's moneylending racket demonstrates what

many go through. Mamraj is an NDMC worker and lives in Gokulpuri settlement. He had borrowed some money from Saluja and was unable to pay on the due date. Saluja's men kidnapped Mamraj. He was badly beaten.

Jassey Singh Saluja usually keeps 6–7 goondas in every areas he operates in. He also recruits help from among the workers by charging low interest or paying small sums.

Mamraj who is also a local activist of Indian People's Front (IPF), tried to mobilize people against Saluja and the moneylending system in operation. He approached one Bharati, another activist from Raghobar Nagar. Saluja's goondas beat Bharati up also. When Bharati went to the police station to complain, he discovered that Saluja had influence in the police station also. The police refused to do anything.

The case was taken up by the local IPF which investigated the whole issue and found out how kidnapping and beating on failure to pay the debt was common practice in these areas. In many case, the moneylender was able to get the money directly at the pay counter from NDMC authorities.

After investigating the case, IPF submitted a memorandum to the Lt. Governor who expressed his helplessness in the matter. As the agitation developed, Sandhya Times, the local evening newspaper of the Times of India, published the whole story. Some democrats and Gandhians also supported the demands of the slumdwellers. As the whole episode went beyond Saluja's power, Saluja approached Bharati and Mamraj and offered to forget about the loan and even pay some money. Saluja's offer was flatly refused and both activists continue to organize to deal with the problem of moneylenders and other issues.

OVER 30% LIVE IN SLUMS

According to the 1981 Census, over 40% of the people in Kanpur (pop. 1.7 million) live in slums. Calcutta has the maximum number of people living in slums, 3.24 million, which is over 35% of total population of 9.2 million. For Bombay, the figure is 3.15 million, 38% of its population of 8.2 million.

The percentage of slum dwellers in other cities are: Delhi – 30, Madras–32, Hyderabad–21, Ahmedabad–26, Lucknow–38, Jaipur–16 and Bangalore–10.

Mishra Govt Discriminates Against Untouchables

Landless peasants of Mohanpur area in the Gaya district of Bihar protested recently demanding that the government provide them work under various famine relief projects. According to the Telegraph, those living in the area are facing great hardship and many are reduced to eating grass and leaves. Most wells have dried up in some villages and the people depend on the few wells left with water.

The Telegraph also said that Jagannath Mishra's government was discriminating against the landless peasants from Mohanpur, particularly the untouchables, because they had participated in a movement demanding agrarian reforms and the implementation of the minimum wages act.

Congress(I) Wins Delhi Elections

Congress(I) won majorities in both Delhi Metropolitan Council and Municipal Corporation in the elections held on February 6. In the 100-member Municipal Corporation, Congress(I) won 55 seats while BJP got 36 and the rest going to other parties; 4 seats were still to be announced. In the 56-member council, Congress(I) won 34 while BJP could get only 19.

The election to Delhi corporation and council became important after Indira Gandhi's defeat in the recent assembly elections in Andhra and Karnataka. Both Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi had campaigned heavily in the election. In campaign advertisements, Congress(I) had pointed to the construction of numerous overpasses before the Asiad as an example of its accomplishments in running Delhi. It had stressed Gandhi's command over every aspect of national and international affairs and promised to continue building Delhi into a "proud capital."

What might have backfired on the BJP candidates was a report about the Vishwa Hindu Parishad asking candidates to sign a pledge that they would protect cows and give priority to Hindu places of worship. According to the Parishad, at least 70 candidates mostly belonging to BJP had signed the pledge by February 2.

After the election results were announced, Atal Behari Vajpayee offered his resignation from the presidency of BJP. He reportedly accepted the responsibility for the party's defeat and had decided to quit as its president. The national executive of BJP however turned down Vajpayee's request to resign following which Vajpayee agreed to withdraw his resignation. According to some observers, another reason for BJP's poor performance in Delhi elections is the infighting among pro-RSS elements and others in BJP.

In another development, BJP won an absolute majority on February 11 in the elections for Indore Municipal Corporation reducing Indira Congress to second place.

Delhi Teachers Win Strike Demands Accepted

Teachers of Delhi university who went on strike on Nov 12 have succeeded in getting their demands accepted by the authorities. The agreement was announced on February 1. The teachers had been demanding that they be considered for promotion denied to them and better housing facilities. According to the existing rules, a lecturer can remain a lecturer all his/her life and he/she may never be considered for promotion. The teachers want that after 15 years of service, every lecturer be considered for promotion. Those who have Ph.D.s must be considered after 10 years and those with exceptional qualifications after 5 years.

The authorities have however never paid attention to the promotion aspect of many teachers in colleges affiliated to

Delhi University though there are procedures for promotion for those directly affiliated with the university departments. After the teachers struck, the authorities first took a tough stand. Later in January, the government decided to refer to the Delhi High court to mediate. The High Court recommended that that the teachers' demands should be met. Following the High Court ruling, the teachers had a meeting on January 23 and decided to withdraw the strike. But the government backed out and rejected the court's ruling. The strike continued until finally pressured by the stand of teachers, the government gave in.

Although the teachers have won the strike, they are still apprehensive that the authorities may not honor the agreement.

Three Migrant Workers in Delhi Brahmin, Muslim, Harijan

INDER MOHAN

Ratasi is a small village in Basti district in eastern UP. It is 200 miles from Lucknow, sited on 180 acres of land. Out of this, 135 acres are under cultivation. The rest of the land falls under huts and houses, passages, grain stores, mango groves, a couple of wells and ponds.

Ratasi's population is nearly 300. Castewise there are 100 Brahmins, 90 Harijans, 85 Ahirs and 25 Muslims. Most of the non-Brahmins are landless. Only two Brahmin families own eight to 12 acres of land. The rest of the landholdings vary from two to four acres. None of the landowners can afford the cost of seeds, fertilizer, irrigation, etc.

Radhey Shyam, a Brahmin, Fazal Mohammad, a Muslim, and Ram Dhan, a Harijan, all belonging to Ratasi, have moved to Delhi. Their old parents, young wives and small children are left in the village.

Radhey Shyam, 24, who was lucky to have primary education, has found a job with a publisher-cum-bookseller. He earns Rs 275 per month and has to work from 9 AM to 7 PM. But his day begins at 3:30 AM. He moves out in the early hours to procure and deliver newspapers to homes. He denies himself healthy food in order to send some money to his family every month. He is trying to save something to be able to buy a bicycle. He shares a 8x10 room in a New Delhi Railway Colony. The colony is full of cesspools and puddles. Its four municipal taps remain crowded when the water runs. As he has to wash and bathe in the open, he has to go without his ablutions quite often. He defecates alongside the railway line and is jeered at by passengers of passing trains. In spite of his dreary routine, he feels he is better placed than hundreds of unemployed or under-employed.

Fazal Mohammad, 23, is a blacksmith. He can never be sure of his income. He lives in Seelampur, one of DDA's Jhuggi Jhopri colonies. According to him, Seelampur was set up in 1960. His abode is an 8x8 wooden shack on the bank of a deep drain that encircles the entire colony. Along with many others he has to live in stench and squalor. Fazal feels that Seelampur is a reflection of living conditions in India. Its approach road has pucca houses and impressive shops. But 90% of its 150,000 residents live in dingy huts and shacks in backyard blocks. He says it is much worse than his village. Because of its choked drains and lack of a sewage system, mosquitoes and flies swarm about at all times. He has to share dry, stinking community lavatories with all others. Fazal supplements his income by collecting scrap material in the form of paper, tin or plastic from rubbish heaps.

Ram Dhan, 26, who was a landless laborer in Ratasi, was under debt there. Here in Delhi, he works as a mason-cum-load carrier at the construction site of a five-star hotel. He is at the mercy of the contractor for his job and is in debt. He had to borrow money initially to meet his minimum needs. He lives along with his

co-workers in a straw hut colony devoid of minimum civic amenities. He has to climb steep heights without any safety measures. A slip has been fatal for quite a few others like him and they died unsung and unwept. Whatever he can save from his meager income is insufficient for his family. On top of that, the contractor eggs him on to take to country liquor to "overcome" his fatigue. He feels as insecure in Delhi as he did in Ratasi.

In the course of my sojourn at Ratasi and my wanderings in Delhi, I came into contact with Radhey Shyam, Fazal Mohammad and Ram Dhan. They meet in Delhi from time to time and say that they have landed themselves from darkness into drudgery. When they see the glittering Connaught Circus, lavishly illuminated five-star hotels and blazing electric lights at the sports stadia, they cannot help thinking of living conditions in their village. They are emotionally attached to their native land and miss their families. They observe that if only a small fraction of this glamor and glory could be spared for their village it would make all the difference. They would certainly prefer to go back to their village even if a small opening for their survival could be visible.

Unrest in JNU

Students of Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi boycotted their classes on February 14 following a strike call by the student union. The union is demanding the immediate dismissal of S.C. Saxena, an assistant professor in the school of computer sciences and systems, who is alleged to have used abusive language against some SC/ST students. The union has also alleged that some SC/ST students of this department were being victimized and given low grades.

To counter the student demands, the teachers observed a token strike on February 16. Dr Saxena was granted anticipatory bail the previous day in connection with an arrest warrant issued against him following a complaint lodged by Chandra Bhan Prasad, vice-president of the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Students' Welfare Association of JNU, accusing Saxena of caste victimization under Section 7 of the Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955.

Anti-Tank Missile Fired at US Embassy

A high-explosive anti-tank missile was fired at the American Embassy on

Dr Saxena has denied that he had ever said anything derogatory about the four students in question either in class or outside. He had also not given them low grades, he said he would not be coerced into changing the grades but the papers could be sent to an external examiner for reevaluation and he would abide by the decision.

February 11 but it failed to explode as it landed in a fountain pool. The incident follows two bomb blasts at Air France and Iraqi Airways offices in Connaught Place ten days previously.

The 3.5" heavy explosive rocket was apparently fired from a launcher from a bush on the Shanti Path lawns across from the embassy. No organization has claimed responsibility.

India Rapidly Becoming Wasteland

An article in Science magazine recently said that "India is rapidly becoming a wasteland and Indians cannot now close their eyes to their environment's degradation." Quoting a study by the Center for Science and Environment based in New Delhi, the article added that vast regions of India are being degraded by soil erosion, salinity and water-logging and desertification.

According to the study which is based

on reports by many groups in India, over half of the agricultural land is threatened by severe erosion and topsoil washing into rivers and lakes is causing widespread siltation. The report also added that area prone to floods has doubled in the past decade due to land degradation. Half of the land brought under irrigation may eventually have to be taken out of cultivation unless remedial measures are taken. Over 2.5 million acres are deforested every year.

Pesticides Found in Foodstuffs

Scientists of the Central Food Laboratory in Calcutta are concerned over residual pesticides in foodstuff much above the tolerance limit set by the Prevention of Food Adulteration Rules of 1954.

After analyzing foodstuffs picked at random from different markets in Calcutta and its neighborhoods, the scientists found that out of 820 samples, containing residual pesticides, 215 items had residual levels exceeding the tolerance limit. In all, 3671 samples were analyzed over 3 years. In 204 items, residual DDT was

found and 169 items contained lindane.

It was pointed out that out of the 3 types of pesticides, organochlorines, which includes DDT, gamaxine and lindane, were the most dangerous. As these chemicals are stable in character, they remain in the environment and the biosystem. These chemicals attack the central nervous system of a living body. Though the use of these chemicals has been banned in the USA and other developed countries, there is no check on their use in India.

Medical Stampede to Saudi Arabia

USHA RAI

There has been a virtual stampede for the interviews being conducted in New Delhi during December-February by a Saudi Arabian health ministry team for medical specialists, doctors, nurses, pharmacists, laboratory and X-ray technicians, anesthetists and other categories of medical personnel.

The visiting team is recruiting more than 2,500 technical hands as well as specialists for employment in Saudi Arabia.

At various venues of the interviews - ranging from a hotel to the offices of three recruiting agencies - the scene has invariably been one of bedlam, with literally thousands of hopefuls from different parts of the country thronging the place. There has been a tremendous response from Bihar (where some 3,000 unemployed doctors have been on strike for

some time now), Kashmir and Andhra Pradesh.

Neither the recruiting agencies nor the doctors and technicians anxious to get recruited yet know where exactly they will be employed.

Specialists are being offered upto Rs 25,000 a month plus a free house, car and other perquisites. Pharmacists and nurses are being offered as much as Rs 9,000 and Rs 7,000 a month.

Dr Sudarshan Vaid, convenor of the Medicine Forum for Enlightenment, has raised the question of the complete absence of the government of India's association with the recruitment for overseas jobs of doctors, nurses and other medics in the heart of the capital on so large a scale.

(from the Indian Express)

Butterfly Business

SHEKHAR GUPTA

Found in abundance in Meghalaya, the kaisar-i-hind (the lion of India) is a butterfly. Being something of a scientific curiosity, it commands a high international price - ten pounds in Britain. It is among a handful of insect species on the international endangered list. The International Union of Conservation of Nature is worried about its survival as clandestine trade - like the one in Himalayan orchids - continues unchecked.

The Indian government feels it has done its bit by banning the export of all butterfly samples - decorative or scientific - but there is no ban on catching or killing butterflies.

Meghalaya is the home of over 500 species of butterflies, many large and brilliantly colored. It is also the only state where the rearing, catching, killing, preservation and sale of decorative butterflies is practiced systematically.

Monopolizing the butterfly business is Delymoore Wore Wankhar, a Khasi entomologist-entrepreneur or no mean credentials. Son of the well-known insect expert, S.K.Sircar, and a Fellow of the Royal Entomological Society of London, he has been trained in insect preservation in West Germany.

Though Wankhar does not acknowledge it, it is clear that what he does in his workshops is inspired by the decorative butterfly industry of Taiwan and China. Butterflies, purchased from collectors in villages (50 p to Rs 2 a piece) and gathered from one of his ten collec-

tion centers or three rearing farms, are killed in a jar containing a mild anesthetic. These are preserved by dipping them in creosote and then drying between two layers of a polyester film. The preserved specimen is then mounted on a concave plaque to make an ashtray or wallplate, or on greeting cards or table mats. Wankhar holds a patent for the process.

The largest plaque, about two feet in diameter, is priced at around Rs 60, the smaller ones cost Rs 12 and the average price of a greeting card is Rs 3. Currently, his sales total Rs 300,000 a year.

Wankhar is keen on openings in foreign markets. "Whom has the ban helped? It does nothing for the protection of the so-called endangered species. It deprives the country of foreign exchange, and a lot of people of employment in a backward state like Meghalaya."

Wankhar says the butterflies and moths multiply at a phenomenal rate and in any case almost half of them are vermin. Billions are killed every year by insecticides, birds and through destruction of broad-leaved forests. "How much destruction can we cause when we breed most of our butterflies in our own farms?" he asks. "Where is the merit in merely banning the export when no state in India prevents by law the killing of any species of insects?"

Weighty arguments these, but you cannot help but notice the gleam in his eyes as he mentions the price of the kaisar-i-hind in the international market.

(from the Indian Express)

ULHAS N. JAJOO

A mother entered the outpatient department of a hospital situated deep in a tribal area of Chandrapur district, carrying her 3-year-old child. The child had a burn around the knee joint. To save themselves from severe cold, mother and child slept near the fire and the child had accidentally put its leg over the fire. The mother had had to walk 10 miles to reach this hospital.

The doctor talked sympathetically and applied a bulky dressing around the joint so that it should not slip. An hour later, the mother was back with another child. The first child walked in with her. The dressing was missing. The doctor could see that all his efforts were in vain and started scolding the mother for her neglect. The doctor attributed this behavior to the free services. According to him the patient and the mother did not deserve the compassionate behavior bestowed on them. He refused to examine the other child. He asked the mother what she did with the big bandage.

The mother went out, and was back within a minute with two langoties (underwear for the child) made out of the same cloth. The doctor could not help but look distressfully at the naked child standing before him.

I was an observer of the whole drama. There was a real challenge - the naked poverty and the real priority needs of the people. If one wishes to take medicine to the people one must consider whether it is within their limits to bear. A socially conscious doctor thus will start thinking of low cost medicine - effective, cheap and appropriate in the existing socioeconomic situation. A series of questions start as to why allopathic medicine is so costly today.

PROFIT MOTIVATION

Do you know what the difference is between the production cost and the market cost of tetracycline capsules? (6 to 8 times)

Why do the same drugs under different brand names have marked differences in consumer prices?

What is the motivation behind the gifts offered to medical practitioners?

Oil Theft on the Rise in Gujarat

Oil is being stolen from the Oil and Natural Gas Commission in Gujarat, according to a report in the Indian Express.

In the latest incident, a hole was drilled in a trunk pipeline of 12" diameter near Dhanej village about 30 km from Ahmedabad on December 30. Presumably taken aback by a jet of oil spewing out, the thieves fled the scene leaving the oil to flow out of the pipeline and flood a four-bigha farm.

ONGC did not discover the leak for 36 hours until a farmer of Dhanej village reported it. There is a system of constant monitoring of the pressure gauges at the central tank farm and the pumping stations. Any leakage in the pipeline is supposed to be immediately detected by a fall in pressure.

Duty on Parts Slashed

A big slash in import duty for automobile components and spares, from the existing 150% to 25%, has been decided by the central government.

The concession will also apply to the two-wheeler industry apart from passenger cars and light commercial vehicles.

The finance ministry is also considering proposals to give concessional excise duty to the automobile industry. One proposal is to base the excise duty on the horsepower of the engine and the other to base it on fuel-efficiency. The auto industry is complaining that 35% of a car is accounted for by excise duty.

What is the reason for lavish samples offered by drug representatives?

What is the drug representative to doctor ratio in our country as compared to the West? (1 to 4 in India, 1 to 30 in developed countries)

Why are drugs banned in the West still being sold in our country? e.g., phenacetin, amidopyrine, analgin, lomitol, depo-provera, proluton depot

Why do substandard and outdated drugs reach underdeveloped countries for marketing?

Have you noticed double standards in instructions? The maximum weekly dose for migril is 10 mg in the US, 12 mg in Britain, and 24 mg in Africa/Asia. Ancolexin (meclazine HCl 50 mg) is not prescribed in the US during pregnancy in view of its teratogenic effects in rats. In Britain, it is considered undesirable during the first trimester of pregnancy, with administration warranted only if vomiting is severe. In the third world, ancolexin is primarily indicated in the treatment of nausea, vomiting of pregnancy.

Do you know that brand names are written in bold letters? Caution and toxicity in small letters five times smaller than the brand name?

How do you feel about the following sales promotion methods? A prize of Rs 10,000 to a doctor who prescribes a certain number of times in a fixed number of months or prescribes only one company's product. For every 100 boxes of a drug ordered, 20 boxes are given free of charge. A cut for every 100 prescriptions.

How about these cultural activities? Chocolate companies show films on cocoa growing in schools and run essay competitions. Radio quiz or sponsoring athletic events. Beautiful baby contests to promote sales of infant formula. Entry to these competitions is typically restricted only by number of bottle tops or wrappers. Draws are often televised or broadcast and reported in the press.

How much do you think packaging should cost?

(from the Medico Friend Circle Bulletin)

Govt Denies Violation of Trade Union Rights

The government has held "certain technical and administrative reasons" for its inability to ratify the International Labor Organization conventions on the freedom of association and protection of the right to organize collective bargaining.

In its communication to ILO, the government denied that there had been any violation in India of the international standards laid down by ILO.

The communication was in response to the complaint by eight trade unions to ILO against the alleged violation of trade union rights in the country and the government's inability to ratify these conventions.

The government's reply stated that the complainants represented certain opposition political groups that, being in a minority and having failed in other attempts to weaken the government, had lodged the complaint so as to embarrass the government in an international forum.

Chenna Reddy Returns to Andhra

After a brief stint as Punjab governor, Chenna Reddy has returned to Andhra. He had been sent to Punjab ten months back in part to remove him from Andhra Congress(I) politics. He had been unhappy at being away from his state politics especially prior to the recent elections in Andhra. Following her defeat, Indira Gandhi is supposed to be in favor of his return to the state.

Patna: Revolt in the Slums

PRADIP SEN

Seven pigs snort and grunt as they emerge from an open drain. They are carrying the carcasses of dead crows in their mouths. They brush past a 2-year-old child, sitting half-naked next to the drain, snot dribbling from its nose. The temperature is about 40 F. An elderly woman rushes up and takes the child into a straw shack open on three sides. Another child wriggles out from a pile of ash that is still warm. His back is bent and his legs curved like a cross-bow. He rests his body against the ash to keep it warm. I am sitting on a bench talking to Ganauri Azad and Shyam Prasad, president and secretary of the Rickshaw-Thela Chalak Mazdoor Sangh (Rickshaw and Handcart Workers Union) of Patna. We are sitting on Rajindernagar-Baisali settlement corner. The police station is 200 yards away.

The cold is intense. My head is covered in a shawl. It is 1 PM but everyone's clothes are chattering from the cold. Chief Minister Jagannath Mishra has declared: "What cold wave? There is no cold wave. Only some sick people have died." Even official figures have put Bihar's death toll due to the cold to over 400.

"In February 1982, the people from the thana came and started demolishing our shacks. This is their 'green belt' program for Patna. They want to clear us out and beautify the city. We fought back with whatever we had in our hands. We had to retreat one block. How long can we fight?" said Shyam Prasad. "We are back again now, but we have no shacks. Nothing. They took everything. We are living under the stars."

The slum-dwellers are responding with their own organization. The Bihar Jhuggi-Jhopri Bashi Sangha (BJJBS) and its growth reflect the serious opposition to the attempts by the central government and its cohorts in all states to artificially beautify major urban residential areas. The Jama Masjid-style demolitions of Sanjay Gandhi have now become a daily affair in India. But slum-dwellers are fighting back, block by block, reorganizing their battle lines and repitching their tents in a continuous battle to lay down their stakes as citizens of India.

There are 85,000 jhuggi-jhopri (slum) dwellers in Patna district along with 35,000 footpath dwellers. There are 45 main bustees in Patna with people engaged in 85 different professions. Most are municipal workers (sweepers) or domestic workers (dais). The slums are in the main mud-walled shacks, extremely clean and well-maintained with small, narrow alleys, giving them the structure of an old city, complete with a town square and a town meeting room with donated upholstery and a large gym-type shack where public programs can be held. One afternoon while I was there (at Purba Lohanipur), young children were being gathered for their regular khichri lunch, a communal arrangement. There is of course no water, no electricity, and no sanitation facilities. The government does not believe these people exist, although without their services there would be no municipal services in Patna.

Twenty years ago CPI would organize the slum-dwellers' struggles against landlord threats and evictions. But nowadays, except at election time, no political party has attempted to assist them.

In 1976, during the Emergency, Congress(I) started its beautification program - destroying the decades-old slum-metropolises and erecting single-family dwellings to house non-poor government workers. In 1977, when Janata came to power, the Karpoori Thakur ministry even passed a law to prevent the bulldozing of slums - but in no time they themselves started smashing up bustees with the help of their political cadre. Mandiri bustee was evicted and three other bustees were smashed. In 1979, the local CPI member of the legislative council (MLC), Ramesh Singh, was allotted the Lohanipur bustee by the government; in no time he mounted a campaign to evict the dwellers so he could build houses for business and rental purposes aimed at the middle and upper classes.

In 1980, the slum-dwellers began a sustained drive to shore up their resources, link up with other bustees and forge a network for their own defense. Kishori Das, born and brought up in the slums - his father was a rickshaw-puller and his mother served as a house-maid - began organizing the Lohanipur bustee dwellers against police and goonda attacks. Kishori, who had already passed his MA and LLB while living in the slums and organizing his people, made sure they were aware of their rights as citizens of India.

Meanwhile, some college students and intellectuals had formed the Rashtriya Nava Nirman Sangh (RNNS) to go and work in the bustees to organize an anti-alcohol campaign and focus on the main enemies of the bustee dwellers - the police and the goondas. Organizers went to all 45 bustees and as a result were able to unite 17 existing local organizations. All these groups decided to unite under RNNS. Their main slogan is "Jis zamin par hum basha gharey hain, woh zamin hamara hi" (where we have built our houses, the land belongs to us). In November 1980 they showed their strength when 5,000 slum-dwellers marched to the District Magistrate for ration cards. Ration cards had been introduced principally so that the poor could get something when so much hoarding was going on. The magistrate refused, stating that without "holding numbers" (given to individuals who have "addresses") no ration cards would be issued. The poor responded with dharnas and gheraos and actively resisted attacks by police and political gangsters until 45,000 ration cards were issued to the slum-dwellers. This was a major victory and reflected the genius and tenacity of poor people's grass-roots organization, led and organized in most cases by poor, illiterate citizens of India.

After this important victory, the central focus of their struggle was directed at the government-inspired eviction programs, which were life-and-death struggles with the police and CPI goondas. The complete turnaround by CPI is reflected by that party becoming landholders in the slums. This convinced the slum-dwellers of their hypocrisy.

The battle against eviction centered around Lohanipur bustee. The Indian People's Front (IPF) office is situated right in the heart of this slum. Ramesh Singh, the CPI MLC, and his gangsters accompanied by the police raided the bustee several times. They always swooped down on the bustee in the afternoon when most of the men had left for work and it was left to the women and children to defend their homes. The raids were initiated with warrants of arrest and followed with physically assaults, breaking of utensils and demolishing and fire-bombing of shacks.

Kishori Das, who is the convenor of the BJJBS, took me to Purba Lohanipur where I met Shanti Debi, who led the resistance in June 1981 against the police-goonda onslaught. Day after day members of RNNS organized a tremendous fightback movement. Reporters from the major dailies descended on the slum to interview Shanti Debi; photographs of her after she was brutally beaten up in police custody were flashed all over the country. The Bihar Assembly was in an uproar. Opposition members made political capital out of this situation. The net result was that next month the government canceled the allotment to Ramesh Singh.

This second victory galvanized RNNS into action on other fronts. Struggles to set up schools were initiated. The Kamgar Mahila Sangathan (Women Workers' Group) came into existence with Madhuri Debi as president and Jhugni Debi as secretary - both Harijan working women from the slums.

At the IPF office, I also met Dhir Singh Balmiki, general secretary of the Patna Nagar Nigam Mazdoor Sangh, another constituent of IPF. Dhir Singh is a Harijan whose father, a sweeper, hails from UP. Dhir Singh himself started as a sweeper at 13. Now he is 30. The organization is a sweepers' and cleaners' union.



Last remaining shack after bulldozing of settlements on Rajinder Nagore-Baisali corner. The people had lived here for 26 years.

-P. Sen, India Now



Organizers of the Bihar Jhuggi-Jhopri Bashi Sangh at Purba-Lohanipur bustee, Patna district.

-P. Sen, India Now

The majority of the 7,000 municipal workers in the city are from the lower castes. Dhir Singh is also an important office-bearer of BJJBS, since he himself was born and has always lived in the slums. In March 1981, in Nayagram bustee, the drunken son of the local DSP rammed his jeep into a narrow alley and ran over a baby. Sangh members immediately confiscated the jeep and would not release it for seven days, despite repeated police attempts. Finally, the district magistrate agreed to the demands of the people to give a job to the unemployed father of the baby who was killed. Congress(I) appeared on the scene, promising to follow through on the demand if the bustee would be renamed after Sanjay Gandhi. They promptly went around hanging up pictures of Indira and Sanjay. This infuriated the people who tore down the pictures and instead named the bustee after Shaheed Bhagat Singh.

At the same time the Bihar Kisan Sabha had developed committees in practically every nook and corner of Bihar. A member of another organization (not related to IPF), which is involved in struggles in the Jehanabad area, remarked that the "Kisan Sabha was practically in every village in Bihar and was expanding its base consistently."

On March 22-23 1982, a sammelan (conference) of the All-Bihar Jhuggi-Jhopri organizations was held. Eighty-seven delegates attended the conference and this is where the RNNS formally be-

came the Bihar Pradesh Jhuggi-Jhopri Bashi Sangh. A secretariat and a council were elected and the closing ceremony was marked by a massive torchlight procession. In April last year they affiliated themselves to IPF. In an editorial last June, the Times of India remarked that all these organizations were part of an elaborate network, painstakingly constructed by the Naxalites over the years and they were undoubtedly "casting a shadow" all over Bihar.

The jhuggi-jhopri dwellers' struggle has now taken root in all urban areas of Bihar. Every day there are reports coming in of daily clashes in Arrah, Madhubani, and Nawada. Krishnadeo Prasad Jadav, the honorary secretary, told me that "it was becoming an all-India phenomenon."

When IPF organized its 100,000-strong October 15 rally against the Bihar Press Bill, rotis were made in assembly-line style in the jhopris to supply the peasants who had come from all over Bihar to demonstrate.

Hiralal, branch secretary at Bhagat Singh colony: "We are citizens of India, allot land to us - we will pay rent - we don't want to do anything illegal. We also want to make this town beautiful, give us water, electricity, schools for our children - but without alternate arrangements, no bulldozer can move us from here. We will do satyagraha, we will even do admadaha, and we will fight back with whatever we have until our last drop of blood is taken away by the police."

INDIA NOW

c/o IPANA

P.O. Box 665

Cathedral Station

New York, NY 10025

c/o IPANA

P.O. Box 37

Westmount

Que. H3Z 2T1

BULK RATE

U.S. POSTAGE

PAID

STATE COLLEGE, PA

PERMIT NO. 18